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MY QUEEN

MARION MARLOWE IN ST. PAUL

OR THE COMPANY'S MASCOT IN A DOUBLE DEAL

BY GRACE SHIRLEY

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Here Is Health

53 Leading St., Cleveland, O.,
Oct. 7, 1900.

DR. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—I am pleased to inform you that your Remedies have completely cured me. I was troubled with weak lungs and chest, and also had catarrh. I *know* the Slocum System is the best in the world, and I will recommend your medicine to all who may be in need of Remedies of their character.

Yours truly,
HARRY L. LYON.

McComb, Pike Co., Miss.,
Oct. 2, 1900.

DR. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—I write to let you know that your Remedies have entirely cured my little girl of scrofula and I feel very thankful to you for all your kindness.

Yours respectfully,
MALISIA ADISON.

Wesson, Copiah Co., Miss.,
Oct. 4, 1900.

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Dear Sir:—In reply to your kind letter I wish to say that since taking your Remedies I am sound as a dollar. I believe had it not been for your medicine I would now be in my grave. I feel very thankful to you for the cure that was performed in my case, and beg to remain,

Yours sincerely,
CHAS. VAN NORDEN.

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Oct. 9, 1900.

DR. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—My little boy had catarrh in the head very badly. When he was five years old I saw your medicine advertised and tried it; and he now is entirely cured. I can highly recommend your medicine to anyone.

Yours respectfully,
MRS. ASA TABER.

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Dear Sir:—I received your letter, also the Remedies that you sent at my request and hope you will pardon my long delay in writing to you but I commenced your good Medicine. The pain in my breast has vanished and I am feeling a great deal stronger than before. I shall recommend your Remedies to all in my town who are suffering from consumption or any disorder of the throat, heart and lungs. Thanking you very kindly for what you have done for me, I remain,

Yours respectfully,
M. L. BOOKER

Orion, Onondaga Co., N. Y.,
Oct. 5, 1900.

DR. T. A. SLOCUM,

Dear Sir:—The remedy which has [illegible] me entirely [illegible] and I owe my restoration to your wonderful Remedies. I am [illegible] thankful to you, and shall recommend your Remedies to my friends.

Yours respectfully,
CHAS. H. DAKE, JR.

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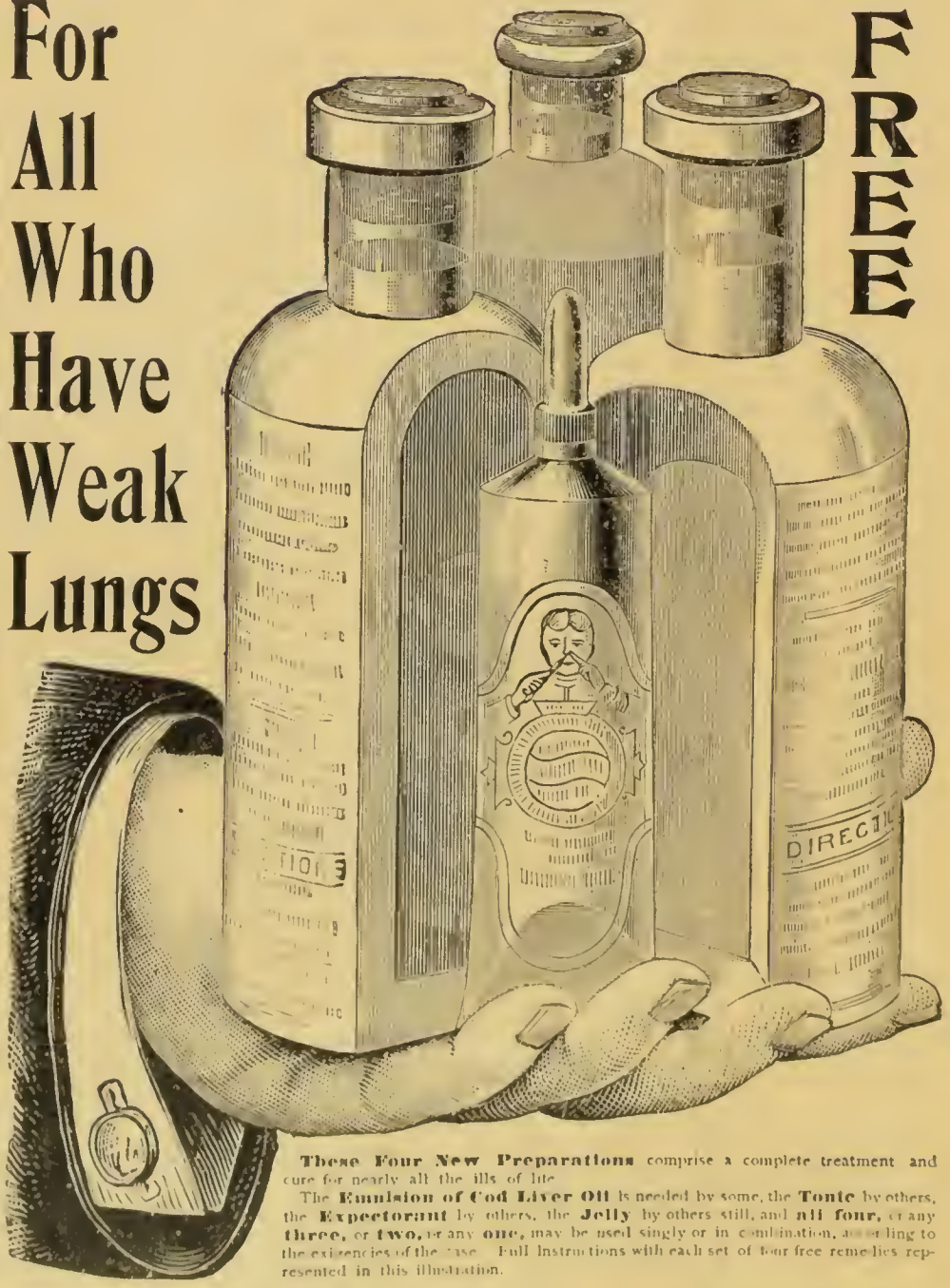

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Marion Marlowe in St. Paul;

OR,

THE COMPANY'S MASCOT IN A DOUBLE DEAL.

By GRACE SHIRLEY.

CHAPTER I.

AN INSULTING WAGER.

"Hello! Who in the world is that! Look, Dan! I mean that girl on the poster that the fellow is sticking up over yonder!"

The speaker, a coarse-featured, but well-dressed man of fifty, stopped suddenly upon the main street of the city of St. Paul and pointed to a bill-poster on the other side of the thoroughfare, who had just pasted the likeness of a beautiful young woman on a convenient brick wall.

His companion, who was younger than himself, raised a pair of glasses to his eyes and looked at the poster scrutinizingly.

"Don't you know that face, Tupham? That's Marion Marlowe, the prettiest actress on the stage. Her pictures are all over town; I've seen a hundred of them!" he said, briefly.

"An actress, is she?" was the sneering answer; "well, for once in my life, I have made a mistake. I would have said that was the face of a respectable girl—but it only goes to show that appearances are deceitful." He was still staring at the poster when his friend moved on impatiently.

"Come on, Tupham! I'm in a hurry! You are gaping at that poster as if you'd suddenly gone daft. If you're 'stuck' on the face, here's a bit of information that will please you. Marion Marlowe is the star of the Temple Theatrical Company, and they're due here to-morrow. They are booked for a week at the Olympia Theatre."

"You manage to keep posted on all these things, Dan," said the man, as he finally joined his companion; "you've got a taste like my own—you dote on actresses!"

"Well, what other women are as interesting?" was the vulgar answer. "An actress knows the world as no other woman knows it. She is chic, gay, generous, well formed and pretty—all very necessary attributes where men are to be considered. Oh, yes, I like actresses and I've had my pick of them!"

"Well, I've received smiles from a few of

them myself," was Tupham's reply, which was accompanied with a conceited smirk. "I'm usually in favor when I care to be, and you can mark my words, I'll win this girl in short order! A face like that is, to say the least, novel."

"And I'll bet I win her," was the quiet answer of the man called "Dan," as he pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and began counting them over.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the street was crowded, but, in spite of that fact, the two men stopped short on the sidewalk and the older one also pulled a roll from his pocket.

"Let's see—she gets here to-morrow, you say," Tupham began, thoughtfully; "well, here's a fifty that says I win her. Mark my words, Dan—she dines with me after the second performance. That's giving her one night to think over my invitation, and the third night—well, it doesn't usually take longer than that! The third night I shall have won the wager, Hobart—and the girl."

"Hold on, Tupham," broke in the younger man, abruptly; "here comes 'Jackets,' the newsboy; let him act as stakeholder. There isn't a man in town that I'd trust as quick as I would 'Jackets,' yourself included, Mr. Archibald Tupham."

"That's all right, Dan! I can return the compliment," was the indifferent answer, and then the men both whistled to a newsboy who had stopped and was idly kicking his heels against a lamp-post on the corner.

A dozen people turned and stared at what happened next, but they were none of them near enough to overhear the conversation.

Mr. Archibald Tupham repeated his bet to the boy, and then the younger man added his own expectations.

"It'll be me that she'll dine with that night," he said, dryly; "and the third night also, so keep your eye on the actress, Jackets, and don't lose the money."

The boy grinned with delight as two fifty-dollar bills were handed to him, and his little eyes snapped like a wide awake fox terrier's.

The two bills disappeared somewhere within the rags of his diminutive trousers, and the newsboy strolled away, whistling, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"Wonderful kid, that," remarked the elder man, at the same time giving his companion a keen glance out of the corner of his cold, gray eyes.

"Ever hear his history, Dan? It's something quite romantic."

Dan Hobart, a man about town, as he was best known in St. Paul, merely shook his head at his companion's question.

"His mother was an actress—and a pretty one, too. I've forgotten her name, but, then, I don't suppose you'd remember her. She died when the kid was born, somewhere in the slums of Minneapolis."

"There's nothing specially romantic about that, so far as I can see," remarked Dan Hobart, as he drew a Havana from his pocket.

There was another keen glance, and Tupham went on:

"The romance lies in the fact that the boy had a father," he said, smilingly—"a very rich man, they say, who fell in love with her. Of course, he deserted her, and she died of a broken heart. That's where the romance usually comes in, I believe," he finished, coarsely.

"It's where it usually ends," was Hobart's reply. "No, strange as it may seem, I never heard the yarn, but then, you know, I come from Chicago; only been in St. Paul a couple of years, but I know the kid well—he is my most loyal subject!"

"Oh, I see! He's one of the Secret Order?" said Tupham, smiling. "Well, I might have known that when you suggested trusting him with the money."

Dan Hobart lowered his voice so that passersby could not hear him. "He's the slickest article in the whole push," he said, with a cunning look creeping into his face. "Why, out of the fifty crooks that I own, soul and body, that kid is the brightest, the quickest, and the most successful! He's worth his weight in gold any day in the week! The funny thing about him is that he hasn't an atom of conscience; but perhaps he inherits that trait from his father."

It was Hobart's turn to glance out of the corner of his eye now, but his friend was also lighting a cigar, so he did not observe it.

"I did hear something about his mother once," Hobart went on, still watching his

companion's face, stealthily. "I heard she was a good girl, but a trifle simple-minded. Well, it is safe to say that the kid inherited nothing from his mother."

"I've got to leave you here. I want to look at the ticker," spoke up Tupham, as he glanced up at the sign over a broker's office.

"We'll meet Thursday at the Hotel Raymond, and the winner can claim his stakes," was the laughing reply. "I'll have 'Jackets' there at about three-thirty. Meanwhile, I wish you success with the beautiful actress!"

"The best man wins. Let it go at that," was the reply. "Fair means or foul, everything goes, Dan! I'm not losing either the actress or the fifty, if I can help it."

"Neither am I," was the answer; and then the two parted.

"There is honor among thieves, they tell me," muttered Hobart, as he strolled down the street. "Well, I'll be as honest with you as you are with me, Archibald Tupham! I'll say nothing of your private business, as long as you keep mum about mine; but when it comes to this actress affair, why, it is entirely different. You'll trick me, my friend, or I'll trick you! There's no honor in a game where the stakes are a woman! Thinks I don't know the rest of that romance," he added, grimly. "Well, if there's anything about 'Jackets' that I don't know, I'll eat my hat! So his mother is dead, is she! Well, that is a surprising bit of information! Now, I was under the impression that she was very much alive; but, then, any one, even Dan Hobart, is liable to be mistaken!"

He chuckled to himself as he turned a corner, then stopped short, put on his eye glasses again, and stared a minute.

Another picture of Marion Marlowe was right in front of him.

"By Jove! she is magnificent, and no mistake!" he muttered, admiringly. "I'll win a kiss from those lips, or know the reason why! Why, if Tupham was here now, I'd raise that bet to five hundred dollars! It's worth it, every cent of it; but pshaw! what am I thinking of? The girl is only an actress! A bouquet, a supper and a bottle of wine! As if I didn't know the way to do it!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MASCOT.

"What's the matter with St. Paul!"

"Dere's nuttin' de matter wid St. Paul! Wot's de matter wid youse?"

The answer came so promptly that it was almost startling.

Bert Jackson, comedian of the Temple Theatrical Company, stuck his head farther out of the window of the hotel stage, which was standing at the railroad depot, and, by stretching his neck considerably, he managed to catch sight of the youngster who had replied to his greeting.

"Well, I'll be jiggered! If it ain't a real live cowboy, minus the 'pop' and sombrero! Come here, kiddy, and let us have a look at you!" he called out, jovially.

"Not on yer tintype! Got sumthin' else ter do 'sides gas wid er fake actor!" responded the youngster.

"A fake, am I? Well, I like that, young man! Why, I'm the only thing that ever happened in the histrionic line! Come over here, you young Westerner, and take a look at me! Bring along a morning paper while you are about it!" was Bert's delighted answer.

"Dat's different!" said the boy, as he selected a paper from the bundle under his arm. "Dis kid ain't got no objections ter transactin' biz, but when it comes ter conversation, he ain't in it—see!"

"In other words, you are only out for the stuff!" said Bert, as he reached down a nickel. "Well, you are a fair sample of what we New Yorkers know as a hustling Westerner; but why don't you take a day off, sonny, and grow up with the country? You look like the twin brother of a prairie dog, or one of those cunning little beasts known as gophers!"

"And youse looks like 'er bloomin' jay!" was the grinning retort. "Gimme me a show, youse, an' I'll grow up quick ernuff. I ain't got no time ter do nothin' now 'cept sell papers."

"Couldn't you manage to take an evening off and go to the theatre?" asked Bert, soberly, as he winked at the other members of the company, who were peering through the

windows of the stage. "We've just struck the town, and we are to be here a week. It would give us great pleasure to bestow a complimentary upon your enterprising joblots. We are the great and only Temple Theatrical Company, and our star is the world's most famous actress!"

He held out a bit of pasteboard as he spoke and the boy eyed it wistfully, but, for reasons of his own, he did not offer to take it.

"Is she purtier'n Lilynn Russ'l?" he asked, with his eyes opening wider.

"Heaps! Russell ain't nowhere!" was the comedian's answer.

"Can she beat Sary Burnhard?" was the next eager question.

"Beat her, hands down! Bernhardt can't touch her!" was the reply, while the audience inside the stage began to roar with laughter.

"Got enny dimons?" was the next question from the now highly excited gamin.

"Trunks full! There they are over there!" answered Bert, pointing to a dray load of big trunks bearing theatrical placards.

"Oh, there's nothing lacking, I can assure you, my friend! She's the only one of her kind, and there'll never be another! You'll miss half your life if you don't come to the theatre!"

As Bert finished he nearly lost his balance, for the driver had suddenly mounted to his seat and started the vehicle.

"Betcher life I'll come! Gimme de pasteboard! I'll be in at de deat', an' don't yer fergit it! Hully gee!"

The boy uttered his words all in one breath as he grabbed for the complimentary, and then gave a war whoop that would have done credit to a Comanche Indian.

"Ain't he funny!" cried Miss Ellis, the *ingénue* of the company, as she nearly tumbled over Bert in order to get another look at the lad.

"He's the littlest newsboy I ever saw anywhere," chimed in Mrs. Burnside, another member of the company. "Why, he isn't much larger than my little Ruby, but I have no doubt that he is a good deal older."

"Me is six!" chirped Little Ruby, the beautiful child actress.

"Thank goodness you don't have to sell papers!" cried Miss Ellis, leaning over to pinch her cheeks. "Why, if we were in New York, how quick the Gerry society would stop your acting; and yet there are dozens of little newsboys selling papers on the street and running into all sorts of danger and no one stops them! I think that law against child actresses is just abominable! Why, there isn't a little girl in the world that has better care than Ruby."

"I don't mean there shall be!" said Mrs. Burnside, proudly. "But I believe they allow those children in New York to sell papers because their parents are too poor to support them. If they get anything to eat, they have to earn it."

"And they call this a Christian country!" burst out the beautiful star of the company, indignantly. "Tiny mites of children are allowed to work in the streets of New York where they are surrounded by the temptations of vice and crime, as well as dangers of every description, and all because a lot of good-for-nothing men and women are too lazy, too wicked or too miserable to support them! It makes my blood boil to think of such things! Why don't the Gerry society or some other society, or the government, force men and women to support their children, or else build protectories for all the poor innocents, where they can be properly brought up and educated? The idea of infants like that boy we just saw being forced to earn their living! Why, he can't help but grow up wicked! There is no other alternative! Poor little fellow! my heart just aches for him."

The tears had crept to her large gray eyes and the beautiful face was flushed with indignation.

"We certainly would go mad," spoke up Alma Allyn, Marion's dearest friend, "if we worried about it too much. We are not responsible for it, that is one good thing, and whoever is—well, I'm sure I pity them. There must be some terrible punishment to follow such wickedness."

"I have an idea!" cried Marion, suddenly. "We have had such dreadful experiences in every city that we have played in. I wonder if a 'mascot' would change our luck any?"

The words were said laughingly, but every one applauded the suggestion.

"A great idea, Marion! I'll catch one for

you!" cried Bert, promptly. "I'll sally forth with a lasso and corral one this very day and bring him around to the theatre in time for the rehearsal!"

Marion's great gray eyes turned upon him with a little twinkle of amusement in their depths.

"I doubt if you could catch my mascot that way," she said, smilingly; "for, oh, Bert! I want that newsboy—the tiny little fellow! I have taken a great fancy to him for some reason or other."

They were in front of their hotel as she finished speaking, and Bert gave a peculiar whistle before he answered.

"If you had asked me to bring you an Indian or a bucking bronco or a desperado of some sort, it would have been dead easy," he said, with a shake of his head; "but, between you and me, Marion, that kid looked slippery. However, I'll do my best, if you really want him!"

CHAPTER III.

BERT'S LOSS.

The company was hardly quartered in the hotel before Bert started on his errand. He would have scoured the length and breadth of the city to please his old friend Marion.

Miss Ellis, the *ingénue*, was also very dear to him, but as yet Bert had not quite decided which was dearest; but, as he was anything but a love-sick youth, the question did not bother him.

"Hello! There he is!" he whispered, as he suddenly caught sight of the little newsboy only about two blocks from the hotel. "Now, I wonder who that swell mug is who is talking with him! Looks as if he might be the Mayor of St. Paul, or the Governor of Minnesota."

He waited a minute until a well-dressed man of middle age had completed his business with the boy, and then called out to the little chap to bring him a paper.

"Hello, youse!" was the boy's greeting, as he darted across the street. "Wot pap der yer want dis time—de *Pierneer* or de *Sun Rise*"

"Oh, either will do—I'm not particular, hustler! I'm just buying the paper to get a word with you, see? You know you told me you hadn't time to talk with fake actors!"

"Oh, I reck'n yer ain't no fake!" said the boy, looking up at him admiringly. "I reck'n yer de right sort, since yer gimme ther pasteboard! Are yer dead sure it's on de square?" he asked, suddenly, as he jerked it from his pocket and eyed it suspiciously.

"Sure! It's for the first row in the orchestra, too," said Bert, laughing.

The boy nearly dropped his papers in astonishment at this news.

"Naw! Is dat so? Me in de first row, wid de bald-headed ol' duffers! Great Injuns! won't I have fun with de bil-yard balls! I'll jes take er lot er paper erlong an' plug spit balls at 'em! It'll be er circus! Sorry yer won't be wid me ter see it!"

The boy was fairly dancing about on the sidewalk, he was so overjoyed, but Bert began to tremble for what was coming.

"But you mustn't disturb the show," he began, with great solemnity. "Why, if we give you the ticket, it wouldn't be fair for you to queer us! For heaven's sake, save your spitballs until after the performance!"

"I'll trow 'em between de acks," retorted the small boy, complacently. "Den dere won't be no queerin' de play fer youse an' de loidy!"

"Ahem! That is what I wanted to say to you," said Bert, quickly. "I have a message for you, hustler, from Miss Marion Marlowe, the beautiful lady that you saw looking out of the stage window this morning."

"Whoop! Gee whiz! Wot yer givin' us, yer bloke? Tink I'm such er lobster I don't know yer is er kiddin'?" cried the clever youngster.

"But I'm not kidding! This is dead straight," said Bert, very soberly. "Miss Marlowe said, when she saw you this morning, that she could see histrionic talent sticking out all over you, and she wants to offer you a position in her company."

The boy looked himself over critically as Bert was talking, and at this surprising offer he dropped his bundle of papers and did a double back somersault on the pavements.

"Good! That's out of sight! So you've really got a specialty!" cried Bert, delightedly. "Well, that is a point you want to re-

member. Tell her you are the champion in your line, and she'll raise the ante. Now, what else can you do? Are you anything of a slugger?"

The boy straightened himself up like a flash and glanced up and down the block. There were a dozen or so pedestrians a little distance away, and another street urchin, about twice his size, was leaning against a hydrant on the nearest corner.

"Am I er slugger! Well, I should snicker! W'y, Fitz an' Jim ain't in it wid dis scrapper! If yer don' believe it, boss, jes watch me er minit! I'll punch dat galoot on der corner in der soler—what yer calls it—in erbout two plunks. Hol' on ter me poips, an' see me do it!"

He darted away to accomplish his purpose, but the boy on the corner did not wait for the onslaught. He took to his heels and disappeared like magic.

"Oh, you'll do! No need to demonstrate after that, kiddy!" cried Bert, who was in paroxysms of laughter.

"Your berth is secure. Just come along to the theatre! I'll guarantee you'll be featured on the very next bill. But, by the way, who was that swell duffer that you were talking to just now? The one in the plug hat and noisy trousers!"

The expression on the boy's face changed like magic as he was speaking, and Bert was astonished to see the look of cunning that crept over his features.

"Wot yer want ter know fer?" was the sage question that came from his lips.

Bert stared a minute before he answered:

"Oh, nothing, kiddy! I just thought he might be the Mayor, you know," he said, indifferently. "You see, I'm a stranger in town, so you must excuse my curiosity. Well, are you ready to come around and call on Miss Marlowe?"

The boy's eyes shone with a mischievous twinkle, and he straightened up with an air that showed clever powers of mimicry.

"Tink, if yer don' mind, boss, I'll change me togs 'fore callin' on er loidy," he said, loftily. "I'll be aroun' in ten minutes, if dat'll do. 'Spose I'm ter come ter the stoige door an' ask fer Miss Marler? I'll sen' up me card. De ace of spoides is me card; but yer kin tell her aforehand dat me name is 'Jackets.'"

"All right, 'Jackets,'" said Bert, as he turned away.

The kid bounded across the street and disappeared around the corner, and the next instant Bert changed his mind and followed after him.

"I'll see where he lives, if I can," he thought, laughing. The next minute he jumped back with a look of astonishment.

The well-dressed man had evidently been waiting for the child, for, once more, the two were together, and in earnest conversation.

"That's funny," thought Bert, as he started back toward the theatre.

There was a crowd around the door waiting for the ticket office to open, and as Bert made his way through them some one pressed hard against him. He turned quickly, and saw a common-looking man apparently trying to regain his balance.

"Beg pardon! They're jammin' me from behind," said the fellow, half angrily; the next minute he slipped from the line, and Bert went into the lobby.

"How long before rehearsal, Jackson?" called out Orrin Olcott, the "villain" of the company, from the window of the ticket office.

Bert put his hand to his vest pocket and then uttered an exclamation of dismay. His watch was gone—some one had picked his pocket.

He dashed back toward the crowd, but there was nothing to be gained. The one face he remembered had vanished from sight, and not one of the group about the door had noticed anything.

CHAPTER IV.

A MASHER.

It lacked ten minutes of two, and the rehearsal did not begin until two; so Marion and her friend, Miss Allyn, seated themselves on the stage to wait for the others.

"It's a good, big stage, and the scenery is fine," began Miss Allyn, as she glanced critically around; "but, do you know, Marion, dear, I am getting a little tired of this life. Really, I sometimes wish I was back on the

paper again! It is so much more fun to write up plays than to act them, and, then again, none of the Western critics quite do you justice, in my opinion! They all say that you are beautiful and clever, but their reports lack feeling, while I—well, if I took a pen in my hand to describe you, Marion, I'd branch off involuntarily into perfect heart-throbs of language!"

Marion burst out laughing, but she looked at her friend tenderly.

"That is because you are so fond of me, Alma," she said, happily. "I think I could write a few sonnets about you, too, dearie, in spite of the fact that I am not gifted with poetry."

"You are a poem in yourself," said Miss Allyn, sweetly. "Dr. Brookes said that last night: so it isn't original—and it isn't the only nice thing that he said about you, either!"

She glanced slyly at Marion, but the young girl only blushed painfully.

"My friends all make too much of me. They will spoil me," she tried to say, calmly. "I wish I felt that I deserved it all, but it only humbles me, Alma, to have you all so fond of me!"

"Another proof of your worth, dearie," was the quick answer; "but here comes the doctor at last, and Mr. Temple with him."

The two young ladies rose and Mr. Temple came forward at once.

"Has any one seen Deering, the stage-manager?" he asked. "He's been 'lost in the shuffle,' as Bert would say, and it is pretty near time to start the rehearsal."

"Here I am, Mr. Temple!" called the stage-manager's voice, and he and Bob Hinton, the calcium-man, came hurrying from the scene-room. "I'd have been here before, only I was met outside by a gentleman. He wished to pay his respects to Miss Marlowe in person, and, of course, I told him that it was against our rules to admit him, but that I would carry his wishes as faithfully as possible."

"Then what did he say?"

Dr. Brookes asked the question.

There was a look in his eyes that amused Miss Allyn.

"There'll be a duel at the stage-door if you tell," she said, laughingly. "Why, what could he say, doctor? Of course, it is that he admires Marion, and that he is only waiting for a chance to cast his heart at her feet, surround her with his love, and pour into her ear the endless cataracts of his brain's mad passion."

The doctor laughed and the ugly light left his eyes.

"Well, if that was the nature of his communication it is all right," he said, amiably. "Marion is used to that sort of thing! I was afraid it might be something in the form of trouble, and there'll be no tragedies in St. Paul if I can prevent it!"

"Indeed, there will not!" spoke up Mr. Temple, quickly. "That Chicago business was enough for me. I want no more tragedies except our fake ones!"

"The fellow did not look as foolish as he talked," went on Mr. Deering, thoughtfully. "He was old enough and intelligent enough to know better than play the masher, but he gave me the same old gags; so I guess it don't make any difference. When one man gets love-struck, he's exactly like the others—age, education, position; they all come out the same in the deal. Well, I don't know as I blame them, after all," he added, laughing.

"Nobody blames them when it is our star that they are gazing at," laughed Miss Allyn; "but, hello! here comes Bert, looking as glum as an oyster! What in the world has happened to our giddy comedian?"

"You've hit it right! I am a trifle giddy," said Bert, disgustedly, as he dropped into a chair. "What do you think of me, anyway? Ain't I a blooming chump! Come from New York to St. Paul to get pinched of my valuables!"

"Oh, Bert!" cried Marion, in genuine dismay.

"Is it possible! Why, Bert, you must have been asleep!" echoed Miss Allyn.

"Lost your watch and chain! I see!" said the doctor, catching sight of the unadorned vest. "Well, that is a shame, Bert; but have you tried to find it?"

Bert pulled himself together and a funny look crept into his eyes.

"If somebody would just take a fall or two out of me I'd be much obliged," he said, laughing. "I may as well own up. I wasn't

asleep a little bit; but, I tell you what I'm going to do: I'm going to keep mum for a while. When I find I can't catch the thief myself, I'll report it to the police. Now, don't ask me any questions, please, for I don't want to answer! If you knew how mean I felt you'd spare my feelings!"

"We will not so much as whisper it to you again," said Mr. Temple, laughing; but whenever you need us, Bert, just let us know. We'll run down anything in town on a minute's notice."

"All ready for rehearsal!" called Mr. Deering, and the members of the company who were in the dressing-rooms came trooping to the scene-room.

"Bert Jackson is down in the dumps! Have you gone back on him, Ellis?" called out Miss Watson, the soubrette, with a little spite in her accents.

Miss Ellis tilted her nose in the air in a disgusted manner.

"Don't you wish I had?" she answered, loftily. "You've been angling for him ever since you joined the company!"

"Nothing of the sort! He isn't my style at all," was the slightly embarrassed answer.

"I should say he wasn't," chirped Miss Ellis, indignantly. "Why, if he was your style, Watson, he couldn't stay in the company! Mr. Temple doesn't engage freaks or curios as comedians!"

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Miss Watson, as the *ingénue* vanished in the wings.

"She's too sharp for you, Lida," laughed Bob Hinton, as he passed her. "It don't ever do to try and twit a girl of her lover. You ought to know that without my telling you!"

"But he ain't her lover," snapped Miss Watson, who was almost ready to cry.

"I'm not so sure," was the low answer, as Hinton moved a little nearer; "but never mind if he is, Lida; you can have one when you want one. I ain't such a bad fellow, if I haven't any money."

He slipped his arm around her waist and was just about to kiss her, when something soft and wet hit him squarely in the forehead.

"Break away, dere, baby!" piped a childish voice, and a boy's head popped up suddenly from behind a pile of scenery.

"Great jumping Jerusalem! It's the newsboy!" said Hinton, savagely. "How the deuce did you get in, and what do you want here, sonny?"

The boy scrambled over the rubbish and made a profound bow, at the same time handing out a dirty playing card with an ace of spades on it.

"Me name is Jackets, an' here's me card," he squeaked, merrily. "Now, git er move on yer, cully, an' persent it ter der loidy! I've come on er invite, a'n I'm in er jewillikins of er hurry!"

CHAPTER V.

THE BRIBES OF VILLAINS.

"Don't let that kid go until I get back!"

Bert whispered the words in Marion's ear as Jackets was balancing himself on the end of a trunk in the star's dressing-room after the rehearsal.

Marion nodded her head. She did not understand the order, but she was quite willing to trust to Bert's judgment and discretion.

"Now, 'Jackets'," she said, merrily, "you are to be my mascot! I wish you to come to the theatre every afternoon and evening, but you mustn't expect to see the show except from the wings after this evening. You are to stay behind the scenes with me and bring me good luck. You understand the nature of your new vocation, don't you?"

"Bet yer life!" was the prompt answer, as the youngster finally managed to maintain his equilibrium.

"I'se am jes like de goat an' de dogs dat de sojer boys had w'en dey wuz in Cuby," he said, soberly. "I'm ter chase de hoodoos ter kingdom come, an' ware de golden wand wats ter bring in de shekels. Oh, I kin do de mascot ack all right. De question is, w'en do I sell me poips?"

"There's a business head for you," laughed Miss Allyn, who was listening. "The gentleman wants to know what you are going to pay him, Marion."

"Oh, but mascots are never paid! That would break the charm!" cried Marion, with a sly wink at Miss Allyn.

The mascot promptly slid down from his perch and started for the door, but Marion made a quick movement and stood in the doorway.

"Oh, I didn't say you wouldn't reap your reward," she said, merrily. "Of course, it is my duty to appreciate your efforts, but——"

"Jackets" interrupted her remark with a contemptuous gesture.

"Dat guff don' go, see! I ain't no bloomin' chump! Yer can't jolly dis kid inter no sech deal as dat! De question is, wat do I'se get fer doin' de mascot ack? It's wort' a dime er day, an' dat's no joke, needer!"

"You shall have your dime, and more, too," laughed Marion, gayly. "So go back to the trunk, 'Jackets,' and we'll talk it over."

The boy scrambled back to his place with an expression of great relief on his dirty face, and just then Miss Ellis and Mrs. Burnside came in and took a look at him.

"Hadn't you better clean him up a little, Marion?" asked Mrs. Burnside, timidly.

"I don't think so," was the quick reply. "You see, I am going to indulge my superstitions on this occasion—and, then, those smudges on his face are so artistic!"

"No, don't alter him a mite!" chimed in Miss Ellis, enthusiastically. "I'd just hang a horseshoe around his neck and let him go as he is! Why, he's an ideal mascot! We'll do a splendid business—no doubt about it."

"If these things are any proof, we certainly are on the road to success," said Mr. Temple, as he appeared in the doorway with a lot of letters. "Here's a dozen mash notes for you girls and two bouquets for Miss Marlowe. Oh, we'll do a good business, all right, if the 'Johnnies' are with us!"

Marion took her letters and glanced at them carelessly, for she was still keeping one eye on her agile caller.

"The flowers are beautiful! I do love roses so much!" said Miss Ellis, as she took one of the bouquets. The next minute she drew a note from the mass of blossoms, and handed it to Marion.

"An invitation to dine at Denham's to-night after the performance," said the young girl, as she opened it. "The same old story—he adores my picture, and will understand it to mean yes if I wear his roses."

"What a flower garden you would be if you wore all their posies!" murmured Miss Ellis, merrily. "And think of all the lobsters you could eat if you partook of all their dinners!"

"Some people are very dense," said Miss Allyn, quietly. "They think because we are actresses we do not observe the conventionalities! Why, even 'Jackets,' here, knew us well enough to send up his card! Let's see, the ace of spades—what does that signify, Marion?"

"I'm afraid 't means bad luck. Couldn't you change it for once, 'Jackets?'" she asked, smilingly. "A mascot shouldn't be carrying a bad luck card, you know. But, then, of course, you did not know you were a mascot."

"Naw! I didn't know it!" retorted the boy, with a grin; and then he calmly drew a small bag of peanuts from his pocket and started munching them.

"Here's another note, Marion," said Miss Ellis, as she turned her attention to the other bouquet. "Do please give me the pleasure of perusing the contents?"

"Please drop it in the waste-basket when you have read it," laughed Marion, as she put on her hat. "I have no time or inclination to read such missives. Really, I think these notes are one of the most unpleasant features of the theatrical business!"

"Well, of all things, Marion!" broke in Miss Ellis. "This fellow says he'll be in a box this evening, and if you will accept his invitation to a supper at Denham's after the performance, please wear the inclosed diamond ring on your middle finger. Now, how many suppers does he think you can eat after one performance, and where, oh, where, is the diamond ring? There is none in the note! The fellow must be dreaming!"

"Here it is!" cried Miss Allyn, snatching up the bouquet. "The stems of the roses are drawn through it, and it's a beauty, Marion! What shall you do with it, dear? Give it to Mr. Temple, I suppose, as you did those bracelets!"

"Yes, he receives all the offerings of that sort," said Marion, laughing; "and he has quite a collection on hand, I believe. You

know, in a great many cases, he cannot prove who were the senders."

"You will accept them, then, eventually, won't you, Marion?" asked Mrs. Burnside, curiously.

"Never!" was Marion's determined answer. "I don't even wish to see them! Why, Mrs. Burnside, don't I know what they mean? Not one of them was proof of honest appreciation! They were all bribes to lure me! Temptations to dazzle my eyes and make me forget that I am an honest girl! No, indeed! I will never, never, accept them! I should feel absolutely guilty if they were in my possession!"

"Well, you may be right," was the lady's thoughtful answer. "Still, there are other ways of looking at it, I think, Marion."

"I'd keep them for spite!" broke in Miss Ellis, scornfully. "But, then, I'm not as honorable in my sentiments as Marion!"

"Oh, don't say that! You are, indeed, girlie!" cried Marion. "You are only jesting when you say you would keep them. You would not keep them a minute! You know you wouldn't!"

"Well, I would, mighty quick!" spoke up Miss Allyn, promptly. "And, what's more, I'd put them all on and fairly dangle them before the eyes of the idiotic givers; and then I'd turn up my nose at them and let them whistle! Oh, there are times when I am positively lost in admiration of women whom the world calls adventuresses! The successful ones, I mean, who fairly bankrupt men! They are the only women in the world who get square with the creatures!"

"They should be punished, of course—the men who tempt the innocent, I mean," said Marion, thoughtfully; "but why not let the law deal with such wretches, Alma? Neither you nor I nor any lady wishes to soil her fingers by handling their bribes! It is too disgusting! too terribly lowering!"

"Hello, girls! Is he safe?" called out Bert Jackson's voice at that minute, and, with a start, Marion turned to look for her visitor.

"Oh, Bert, he's gone! He's run away!" she cried, remorsefully; "and I only took my eyes off of him one tiny little minute!"

Miss Allyn sprang to her feet and gave a sharp glance around the room.

"Catch him, somebody! And be quick about it!" she called out, instantly. "The mascot has escaped—and that isn't all! He's vamoosed with the diamond ring—the little rascal!"

CHAPTER VI.

TWO MASTERS.

"Well, how did she take it, 'Jackets?'"

Mr. Archibald Tupham asked the question of the boy as he met him on a street corner exactly an hour after the child's exit from the dressing-room.

"It's no go," was the prompt answer; "the actress won't look at yer! Gotter tink of sumthin' 'sides mash notes ter ketch dat loidy!"

"Is she pretty, 'Jackets?'"

The boy gave a whistle that could have been heard a mile.

"Is she? She's er peach!" was the enthusiastic answer. "W'y, de gen-ooin' stars ain't in it wid dat fake star, see! She's de purties acktress on de stoige, an' don't yer fergit it; but she's er game one, I tell yer! She's onter yer, boss! Gotter ketch 'er on de level, or else not ketch 'er!"

"Oh, I see! I must get an introduction," remarked the man, shrewdly. "Well, how about Hobart's note—did she take to that kindly?"

The boy made a grimace that was expressive of honesty, at least.

"Naw, she trim him down, too. Dere ain't needer of yer in it!" he said, delightedly.

"Hol' on, boss!" he went on, as Tupham moved away.

"Dere's a gal in de company, de soobret, dey call er! She'd help yer ketch on in er minit. She's got it in fer Miss Marler."

"What's her name?"

Mr. Tupham asked the question with a cunning look in his eyes.

"Lida Watson," said the boy, with unusual alacrity. Then he put his hands in his pockets and started off in the opposite direction.

"Mighty particular, for an actress," muttered Tupham, as he walked along; "but I know what I'll do—I'll approach her through

her manager. I'll leave no stone unturned to win that wager!"

He dropped into a friend's office after that and wrote a couple of letters, and, before they were finished, "Jackets" was once more being interviewed on a lonely corner—this time by his rival, Mr. Daniel Hobart.

"Well, 'Jackets?' "

The exclamation was answered by a peculiar grin from the boy. Then the small, dirty hands dove down into the ragged pockets.

"Dat's de kermedian's watch, an' dere's de star's di'mund ring," he said, indifferently. "Now, gimme er dollar, boss. I wants it fer me mudder."

Dan Hobart secreted the valuables with a lightning-like gesture, and then handed the child a silver dollar.

"How did she take my note?" he asked, after a quick glance around.

The boy shrugged his shoulders, and his grin grew wider.

"Youse ain't one, two, tree in de game, see!" he said, glibly. "She ain't got no use for needer of yer, boss. Yer dough is safe, and so is yer rival's."

"You mean that she won't dine with me to-night?" asked Hobart, in astonishment.

"Naw, nor enny odder night—not 'nless you make 'er," was the boy's cool answer.

"I'd do that quick enough, if I knew how," began the man. Then he turned to "Jackets" and eyed him narrowly.

"You are a clever boy, 'Jackets.' Give me a pointer?" he said, softly. "Tell me how to win that bet, and you shall have the fifty."

The boy's eyes flew open, and his hands went back into his pockets.

"Dere's a gal in de company dey calls Lida Watson. Jest corral her, boss, an' she'll do de res'. She's got it in fer de star an' de hull kerboodle of dem," he said, glibly.

"Thanks, 'Jackets!' You're a shrewd one—a true son of your father! If I win this deal, you shall surely have the fifty."

"See here, boss!" The boy had suddenly straightened up, and his voice had grown softer. "Wot does er pickpocket like youse know erbout my fader?"

Dan Hobart caught his breath and stared at the questioner. There was a look on the dirty face that he had never before seen there.

"My fader wus er rich man, an' er gentleman—mudder says so," said the child. "Now, youse come off, Dan Hobart! Don't youse git fresh erbout my fader!"

Dan Hobart, the "man about town," walked away without answering. For some reason or other, he did not care to rile "Jackets."

"That boy would give me away in a minute, I believe. I'd better be careful," he muttered, anxiously.

Then he, too, dropped into a friend's office and wrote some letters, one of which was addressed to Miss Lida Watson.

That evening, when Miss Watson was in her dressing-room, just before the performance, two letters were handed to her, each accompanied by a bunch of roses.

"You just ought to see her! She's almost beside herself with joy," whispered Mrs. Burnside to Marion. "Why, the girl imagines that she is a great artist now, and all because two of the 'Johnnies' have noticed her."

"I can't quite understand their beginning so soon," said Marion, with a careless glance at some wilted bouquets in the corner of her dressing-room. "Why, the public of St. Paul has not seen us yet. How is it that they send flowers before the first performance?"

"I can understand why they send them to you—they have seen your picture," spoke up Miss Allyn. "But why they should favor Miss Watson I can't understand. She's pretty, all right, but nobody here knows it."

"I hope her head will not be turned by it," said Marion, sorrowfully.

"Why, Marion! hasn't she been trying to turn Bert's head ever since she came into the company?" asked Mrs. Burnside, laughing.

"That is different! Bert can take care of himself, and I am afraid she can't," said Marion, quickly.

"She is old enough, and has been on the stage long enough, not to be silly," spoke up Miss Ellis, sharply. "Of course, you'll all think I am jealous of her, if I say anything more, but I do think she deserves all she gets if she persists in flirting."

"Well, Bert is safe from her wiles, so you

don't have to worry," said Mrs. Burnside, laughingly; "but I shall be thankful if we ever get a soubrette that harmonizes with the company. They all seem to jar—and we've had a dozen."

"I wonder if 'Jackets' will come back," spoke up Marion, suddenly.

A shout of laughter followed her exclamation.

"What! After pinching the diamond!" cried Miss Ellis, merrily.

"Well, I should think not, if he is wise," was Miss Allyn's comment.

"We can't prove that he took it," said Marion, with a sad smile. "And, someway, I did so want to try the effect of a mascot."

"Well, you won't see him again to-night," said Miss Ellis, emphatically. "Why, he went like a flash when he left the theatre. Bert and the doctor ran three blocks in both directions, and he had disappeared completely, the little monster!"

"Here's Bert now!" called Miss Allyn, as the comedian appeared upon the threshold.

Bert was wearing a broad smile to hide his chagrin over his loss, and as he pushed the door open wider he looked around for Marion.

"I've been looking through the peep-hole in the curtain," he said, gayly, "and what do you think, Marion—even the boxes are full! There's an old duffer in one box with an armful of roses—and, come to think of it, I've seen the fellow before! Now, where in the world was it, I wonder?"

Marion was about to answer, when Miss Allyn interrupted her.

"He's the one that sent the ring, without a doubt, Marion! Now, isn't it a pity that you can't give it back to him—hand it over the box, you know, with a freezing look of irony! Why, you could petrify him with a glance, and then explain it to the audience! It would be a scene that would go down in the annals of stage history!"

"Yes, and what an 'ad!'" broke in Miss Ellis, enthusiastically. "Oh, that miserable kid! Why did he steal it!"

"Marion could make that galoot wish he'd never been born," chimed in Bert, admiringly. "Why, he'd feel like thirty cents when she got through with him—but, Gee whiz! I've just thought where I saw the old duffer! It was on the street this morning, and he was talking to 'Jackets!'"

There was a genuine cry of astonishment, and then Miss Allyn got her breath.

"Well, that's one way of giving a present with a string on it!" she cried, excitedly. "Send a diamond ring to a girl and a kid to steal it back!"

"Why, Alma!" exclaimed Marion, "that can't be possible. You know it was Bert who went out and captured the mascot!"

"Yes; and lost my watch!" added Bert, with a groan. Then he and Marion both stood still and looked at each other. They had both thought of the same thing—it was that "Jackets" had stolen the watch.

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD ACTING.

"Funny I didn't think of that before," muttered Bert to himself as he walked slowly toward the stage. "Here I've been wasting valuable time chasing all over town for that galoot that crowded me at the door, when it's dollars to doughnuts it was the kid that 'pinched' it!"

A moment later, the performance had begun, and every member who was on the stage had taken a sharp look at the occupants of the boxes.

Miss Watson was almost hidden behind a big bunch of roses in the first act, and, through the second, she wore one in her hair and a large cluster on her shoulder.

It was as plain as day what the conspicuous decorations meant. She was answering one of the communications which she had received during the evening.

But the well-dressed man in the box hardly glanced at the soubrette; he was staring fixedly at Marion through a pair of opera-glasses.

"Must be near sighted," whispered Miss Ellis, as she passed the soubrette. "I suppose he is looking for the diamond ring that he sent her this afternoon."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Watson, who had not heard of the incident.

A moment later both girls made their exit.

and she was able to finish her indignant exclamation.

"That gentleman in the box was looking at me. You are mightily mistaken if you think it was Miss Marlowe!"

"So he is the 'mash' you are going to dine with, is it?" asked Miss Ellis, tantalizingly. "Well, for my part, I'd dine alone, if I couldn't have a young fellow! No grandfathers for me, please—but, of course, 'beggars can't be choosers!' "

She ran off through the scene-room before the girl could reply, and a moment later she and Bert were having a cozy chat together in the wings, while Marion and the doctor held the audience spellbound with one of their dainty love scenes.

When Miss Watson's next cue came, she kept the stage waiting for nearly a minute, and when she finally made her appearance she was flushed and nervous.

She had been talking outside of the stage door with a young man who had been seated all the evening in the rear of the theatre, and it was plain that she was laboring under great excitement.

The stage-manager scowled at her as she passed him, and Dr. Brookes, who was waiting for her to enter the dialogue, was obliged to "fake" a line in order that the audience should see no break in the conversation.

But Miss Watson only tossed her head indifferently and repeated her lines parrot-like. She was in a mood that bordered on rashness. Safely hidden in her pocket were two extraordinary letters, both offering her large sums for a trifling service—a service which she was just wicked enough to perform gladly.

Would she introduce the writers to Marion Marlowe?

That was the purport of both letters, and both had been answered.

Whether the writers' motives were honorable or not she neither knew nor cared. She was jealous of Marion; and, besides, she wanted money.

As she stumbled through her lines her brain was busy. It was no simple undertaking to deceive the young girl, for, although Marion was unexperienced in the wickedness of the world, she had the instinct of caution, and always insisted upon candor.

Miss Watson was almost hysterical when she left the stage, but she was determined to succeed in her malicious efforts.

"May I speak with you just a minute, Miss Watson?"

Marion asked the question as she tapped on the soubrette's dressing-room door, after she had taken her usual curtain call at the end of the third act.

There was a sharp rustle of paper, as though the soubrette was secreting something. Then Miss Watson bade her enter in an extraordinarily polite manner.

"Do come in, Miss Marlowe! I am awfully glad to see you! It isn't often you honor me with a call!" she rattled off, eagerly.

"I don't have much time to be sociable when I am at the theatre," was Marion's answer; "but as neither of us go on until nearly the middle of the act, I thought there was time to have a few words with you."

She closed the door as she spoke, and then went straight up to the actress.

"Dear Miss Watson, please don't be angry, but I do want to advise you!" she said, gently. "Don't, pray don't, accept any invitations to suppers with strange men! You know as well as I do, what their invitations mean! They will surely lead to trouble—you know it, don't you?"

Miss Watson drew back, and her face flushed hotly.

"Who told you I had?" she stammered, angrily. "Oh, I suppose it's that Miss Ellis! The mean, spiteful creature!"

"Miss Ellis did not say a word," said Marion, quickly. "Mrs. Burnside merely mentioned that you had received a note, and I could not help worrying for fear it was an invitation to dinner, and that you had accepted it."

"Well, what if it was, and what if I do accept it, Miss Marlowe? Whose business is it, I should like to know?" retorted the girl, furiously.

The lovely gray eyes of the young star filled with tears in an instant, but she only laid her hand tenderly upon her companion's shoulder.

"It is my business, Miss Watson, because I am your sister woman," she said, quietly. "It is my duty to warn you, if I think you are doing wrong, exactly as it is your duty to warn me if you see me running into danger."

Miss Watson stared. She could not quite understand. She had been on the stage several years, but no other actress had ever called her sister.

"Don't go to dinners with strange men, dear—please don't," urged Marion. "It is not right, and, besides, it is dangerous! Why, you might be drugged and even assaulted!"

She breathed the words cautiously, and her cheeks flushed as she mentioned it, but every nerve in her body was quivering with eagerness.

"Nonsense! I've been before, and I guess I can go again," said Miss Watson, coldly. "What harm is there in a dinner, I'd like to know? All actresses do it—at least, all who are not prudes! You are too nice for the profession, Miss Marlowe!"

Marion stared for a minute, but the soubrette was thoroughly angry now. She had "thrown prudence to the winds," and was giving full vent to her feelings.

"How can one be too good for a noble calling, Miss Watson?" she asked, calmly. "Is there anything grander than the portraying of noble characters, the expressing of lofty sentiments and the depicting of ideal conditions? Why, I think the stage is one of the world's greatest fields for usefulness! People listen to inspiring words and become interested in fine characters, and, naturally, they are influenced for good—they cannot help being!"

The young girl spoke eloquently, but only a coarse laugh followed.

"There's mighty little lofty sentiment in some of the plays, Miss Marlowe," retorted Miss Watson; "and, as for ideal conditions, why, look at the most successful plays! Every actress, to be a success, has to play the part of a bad character!"

"Oh, no! You are wrong!" cried Marion, in a shocked voice; "but this is not what I came to talk about, Miss Watson. I came to beg you, as a friend, to be very careful. Please do not go to dinners with any one, unless you know they are to be trusted."

"You are mighty suspicious, seems to me," said the soubrette, with a curious look. "Perhaps you have been out with the wrong fellow and been drugged, Miss Marlowe!"

Marion conquered her indignation at the girl's coarse words, and her face grew pale as she answered, slowly:

"I have never accepted an invitation from any man whom I did not know. But, oh, the experiences, the horrors that I have been through! It frightens me to think of any one else being in danger of them. That is why I came to warn you against them."

This much she could say with perfect truth. As to her having been drugged, it was only too true that such an experience had befallen Marion, although she had fallen into a trap unwittingly, and had been rescued before any serious harm had been done. However, she knew that if she told Miss Watson of such an experience, the girl would refuse to believe that she was not to blame, so Marion wisely refrained from mentioning it.

Miss Watson was toying with a bit of paper as Marion spoke, and, as the young girl finished, she crumpled it in her fingers.

"I've only known you a little while. Why should you care what I do?" she asked, slowly.

Marion took a step forward, and a tender light sprang into her eyes.

"Oh, Miss Watson! can't you understand? It is because you are young and innocent! Do you think it makes any difference how long I have known you? Can I not, in all sincerity, wish you to be honest and happy?"

The girl looked uneasy. She was growing desperate now. She was determined to win her end, but how should she do it?

In the twinkling of an eye she saw her mistake. She should not have been so quick to lose her temper with Marion.

"I have promised to go to-morrow night," she muttered, under her breath, "and you wouldn't have me break a promise, would you?"

"I certainly would—a bad one!" whispered Marion, quickly.

"Do you really care so much?" asked the soubrette, in a lower voice, and with her lids drooping sadly.

"I do, indeed," was the quick reply. "Oh, what can I do to prove how much I care, Miss Watson? I do so wish you to believe that I really care for you!"

Miss Watson shook her head, and a tear actually sparkled on her lashes.

"If you would only do something for me, Miss Marlowe! If you would only listen and sympathize with my secret."

Marion stared at her a minute. The change in her manner was mystifying. Then a sudden longing came into her heart to listen to her secret and to befriend her, if possible.

The girl was alone, and she was only eighteen; besides, there was something in the soubrette's face that reminded her of her own twin sister, Dollie.

What if Dollie were in a position like this?

As the question flashed into her mind, Marion put her hand on the young girl's shoulder.

"What do you wish me to do, dear?" she asked, very tenderly.

Miss Watson raised her head and looked her squarely in the face.

"I am in love, Miss Marlowe," she said, in a curiously strained voice; "and I want you to join my lover and myself in a supper to-morrow night! If you will do this, Miss Marlowe, it will prove to me that you are sincere; that you are really my sister-woman, as you just said. You see, we have been lovers a long time; but I did not wish anyone to know; and now—well—he wants me to marry him," she went on, almost shyly. "And, oh, Miss Marlowe, I do so want your opinion of him! Come out with us, there's a dear, and don't say a word to the others!"

Her voice was so pleading, and her eyes were raised so wistfully, that, just for a moment, the young girl hesitated.

"Do come, Miss Marlowe! You must see my lover! What harm can it do for us to go to a little supper? If you do not approve of him, here is a promise, Miss Marlowe—you have only to say so, and I will have done with him forever!"

The girl's face was flushed as she spoke, and she was breathing heavily. As Marion gazed at her earnestly, she could not help believe her.

"Poor girl! you have no mother and no sister!" she said, sympathetically. "Yes, I will go with you, dear; and then I will advise you."

Miss Watson crowned her victory by a traitor's act. She made an impulsive movement and kissed Marion's cheek. Then, as the star was obliged to go, she held open the door for her.

The moment she was gone the soubrette dropped into a chair and stuffed a towel into her mouth to keep from screaming.

"Who says I'm not an actress?" she whispered to herself. "That's one on you, you virtuous Saint Marion!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER MOVE IN THE GAME.

"Gee whiz! boss, he's corralled the soobret! Dey're in de hash-house dis minute! Come an' take er squint at 'em troo de windy!"

"Jackets" squeaked the words into Dan Hobart's ear after standing on tip-toes before the brilliantly-lighted windows of a restaurant for nearly five minutes.

Dan Hobart's brow darkened, but he turned abruptly.

"I'll take your word for it, 'Jackets,'" he said, with a scrowl. "So he's on to the same game; and, what's more, the first trick is his! Strange how he captured the soubrette, in spite of my letter!"

The words were uttered savagely, but "Jackets" only whistled serenely. It was a trick of his trade to serve two masters, and, incidentally, himself, if the thing were possible.

"'Spect I knows how he done it," he squeaked, after a minute's silence, while he was trailing along in the wake of the "masher."

"How did he do it?" asked Hobart, sharply, as he halted under an awning, where the electric lights were not so searching. "Why, I saw her at the stage door myself, and I've got her promise——"

He stopped abruptly. He was getting too confidential, but "Jackets" was not disturbed by his master's manner.

"Well, de oder feller wuz in er box an' er

makin' eyes at 'er all de evenin'; dat's wot takes wid 'em, boss! It's no wonder she trun yer one!"

Dan Hobart smiled at the newsboy's wisdom. Then he said good-night and sauntered off in another direction.

Tupham surely had the first "inning," but his turn would come next. Miss Watson had promised him faithfully that she would introduce him to the star, and she also felt confident that she could win her consent to a dinner, provided, of course, that three were included in the party, and that her story of an engagement was backed up properly.

"That's all I want," he muttered to himself. "Once let me get her at a table, with a bottle of wine, and—pshaw! the little soubrette can easily be gotten rid of; and—well, it will be the first step, and perhaps the deciding one in the winning of that wager."

He turned a corner abruptly, and came face to face with a woman. She was young and girlish-looking, but her face was pale and drawn with suffering. Still, Hobart recognized it, for he had seen the woman before.

There was a moment of hesitation as the woman passed; then Dan Hobart stepped back and raised his hat, politely.

"I beg your pardon, but you are Mrs. Evans, are you not—the lady who has the honor to be the mother of 'Jackets,' the newsboy?"

The question was asked mildly, but the woman answered in actual fright:

"I am Jack's mother—yes. Why do you ask?" she questioned, sharply

"Because he is a very bright boy, and because I am interested in him," was the man's smooth answer. "Besides, he has often spoken your name, and I am naturally pleased to see you!"

He smiled as he spoke, but the woman only stared at him.

"My name!" she repeated, in a startled whisper.

"Yes, your name—Lottie Evans——" he began, when a cry of alarm interrupted him.

"It is false! He never told you!" she whispered, under her breath. "'Jackets' never mentioned my name to you, for he does not know it!"

The words fell like drops of molten lead from her lips. They were scorching with the fire of shame and anguish.

"Ah! Then it was Tupham who told me," went on the cruel voice. "It must have been Tupham! He tells me all his secrets!"

The woman's face was ghastly now, and her eyes were shining. She pressed her hands over her heart, as she moved a little nearer to him.

"Has he told you everything—are you sure?" she whispered, hoarsely. "Has he told you that he was a traitor, a scoundrel, a villain? Has he——"

She put her hands to her brow, and a stifled cry finished the sentence.

"Oh, what am I saying?" she whispered, wildly. "He would kill me if he knew! I must be mad to dare to even whisper his perfidy!"

She turned to flee from Hobart's presence, but a firm hand detained her.

"Don't be alarmed, madam," said the fellow's voice in her ear. "Just calm yourself and listen. I, too, hate Archibald Tupham for a good many reasons. Further, I know every secret of his life—yes, every detail of it, madam—and I can ruin him, do you hear; and I will ruin him, if you will help me!"

There was a death-like silence, while the woman fairly trembled in his grasp; then she raised her eyes and stared at him, searchingly.

"Do me one little favor, madam, and your revenge will be complete! I will expose Archibald Tupham and bring him to justice. You will not appear in the affair at all. Will you do me that favor?" he asked again.

There was another silence, while the woman tried to collect her thoughts. Then she answered his question in a tremulous whisper:

"I would do anything—anything—to punish Archibald Tupham. But, oh, sir, no harm must come to my boy! I do not care for myself—but my baby must be protected!"

"He shall be! Now will you promise?" asked Hobart, drawing her still farther into the shadow.

The woman bent her head and clenched her hands together.

"What is it? What must I do?" she asked, in a whisper.

Dan Hobart leaned over and murmured something in her ear, and, as he finished, he moved away with a word of warning.

"If you refuse, you take the consequences," he said, warningly. "I have shown you how easily you can do the thing. Now, if you fail me—well, you can guess the rest! I will go to Tupham—and how could I have learned the story if you did not tell me?"

A harsh laugh followed the question, and Dan Hobart strode away, leaving a pale, hollow-eyed creature standing like one stricken upon the sidewalk.

"Oh, I was a fool! I was mad!" moaned the woman, softly. "He will kill me now—I feel it! I know it! Oh, my baby!—my Jack! How can I save you? I must do it—and yet how can I? How can I? Poor girl! Poor, innocent Marion Marlowe!"

The last words fell from her lips involuntarily, as she came into the light; for a large lithograph of the beautiful actress was directly before her.

She clasped her thin hands together, and the tears rolled down her cheeks as she stared.

The street was nearly deserted, so there was no one to see her.

"He would ruin and wreck your life, as mine has been wrecked and ruined," she murmured, in agony. "He would blight your youth with the canker of lust and rob your heart, your soul, of all its happiness! Oh, God! is there no way to thwart his designs? Is there no way, no way? Must he triumph in his wickedness?"

She wrung her hands, and the tears seemed to dry upon her lashes.

A thought had come to her which was freezing her blood with horror. "And I must help him to do this deed!" she whispered, hoarsely. "I must aid him in his plans. No, not to save my own miserable life, but to save the peace of mind, the future of my baby!"

She bowed her head and went on through the night. It was an alternative that was driving her to the verge of madness.

That night, before she retired, she mailed a wretchedly-written letter. It was addressed to Marion Marlowe, and told a truthful story of poverty, but the signature, "Ida Inez," was supplemented by the information that she had once been an actress of some repute, but that now she was only the unfortunate mother of "Jackets."

CHAPTER IX.

A VACANCY IN THE COMPANY.

When Marion received the letter she was filled with pity.

So "Jackets" was really the possessor of a mother!

There was nothing to indicate maternal love in his appearance, for no elf-child could have been more weirdly and wonderfully constituted as to dirt and garments.

Would she help this poor creature who had turned to her for aid?

She had once been an actress, and that fact alone was sufficient to open Marion's heart strings.

She passed the letter on to Mr. Temple at once. If it were a possible thing, he must give a "benefit" for this woman.

"But she needs money at once, no doubt," was the manager's reply.

Marion smiled serenely. She had already thought of that. She intended to have the doctor go with her to visit this woman.

All that day she kept her own counsel as to the anticipated dinner with Miss Watson, for although she had some misgivings, Marion was always loyal to a promise.

The entire company found time to visit the Falls of Minnehaha and other points of interest, but not even this recreation could quite remove the air of uneasiness that marked the little soubrette's manner. She was so changed that every one in the company noticed it, but only Marion could explain it, and she laid it to nervousness on seeing her lover.

The young girl found herself watching for "Jackets" as the hours went by, but the evening performance was played without a sign of the "mascot."

"Will she come?"

Dan Hobart asked himself the question a

dozen times during the day. He had very little faith in Miss Watson's promise.

When he was admitted at the stage door, he could hardly believe his senses, and at midnight, as he sat at a table in Denham's, with the beautiful girl at his side, it was a difficult matter to conceal his satisfaction.

But Miss Watson was not so easily disposed of as he had hoped. She had earned her promised reward and become wonderfully indifferent. Why should she care for the vicious pleasure of a perfect stranger, who had the poor taste to prefer Marion to herself and could hardly keep up the pretense that his own craftiness had suggested?

It was a question that she asked herself as she pocketed a good-sized bill which Hobart passed to her under the table. After that she drank little and got careless in her acting, but she did not for a minute dream of leaving them.

Bert Jackson and Dr. Brookes occupied seats at another table, and neither of them hardly took his eyes off Marion during the dinner.

In another corner of the big dining-room sat Archibald Tupham, but he had hidden himself carefully behind some heavy draperies.

Though Tupham had won the first move the night before by dining with Miss Watson, Hobart had now received the first mark of favor from Miss Marlowe, and Tupham was furious with rage, not only at his victorious rival, but at the little soubrette, who was smiling as blandly as though she had not tricked him. But there were still twenty-four hours in which to win the wager, and "Jackets" was on the watch to report the doings of his rival.

Miss Watson had proven herself a treacherous accomplice, but there was still another way open to accomplish his purpose.

When Marion left Miss Watson that night it was at her door in the hotel. She had kept her promise, and now she was ready to express an honest opinion.

"I don't like him," she said, simply; "but I am sure I don't know why. He seems fairly nice, but I do not think he is honest."

Miss Watson's reply astonished her greatly.

"I guess you are about right!" she blurted out, with a burst of hysterical laughter; "but you have done me a good turn, my dear, dear sister! You've helped me to make a three-weeks salary in one evening!"

She slammed the door in Marion's face and bolted it on the inside; then the innocent young girl heard her screaming with merriment.

Marion went to her room, feeling sick at heart. She had been duped and deceived by this girl, but how? It was a question that she could not answer at present.

As soon as she reached her room, she told Alma the whole story, and the two stared at each other for the space of a minute.

"I did not believe she was sincere, but I did not like to say so," said Miss Allyn, finally, "especially after you mentioned that she reminded you of Dollie! Oh, Marion! It doesn't pay to be too sympathetic! You have made a sacrifice for this girl, and what is your reward? Why, you may have done yourself an injury this very evening!"

Marion raised her head proudly, and a calm light shone in her eyes.

"I have done what I thought was right, and I will abide by the consequences," she said, quietly. "I shall never refuse to help any one, Alma, and, if they deceive me, the wrong is on their shoulders."

"You are a noble girl," was the answer, just as some one tapped upon their door.

"Is Marion safe?" whispered Bert's voice, through the keyhole.

Marion went at once and opened the door.

"I'm safe; yes, thanks," was her smiling answer; then, as Bert was about to speak, she put up her finger, pleadingly.

"Don't scold me, Bert! I know it was thoughtless! I ought not to have gone without telling you all, but Alma knew, and, then, it was such a little distance—right in the heart of the city—so I was as safe as anything!"

"Well, we didn't get there quick or anything, did we?" laughed Bert; "but good-night, girls! I won't scold this time! I suppose that little minx inveigled you into it! Your heart is four sizes too big for your body, Marion!"

He closed the door, and the two friends retired, but Marion could not sleep; she was thinking of Miss Watson.

"Rehearsal at eleven!"

Mr. Temple announced the fact as they met at their late breakfast, and then glanced over the table to "round up" his company.

"Miss Watson has left us," said Mrs. Burnside, soberly. "She took French leave this morning, about daylight, I fancy."

Marion looked up in surprise, but Mr. Temple answered, very coolly:

"That saves me the trouble of telling her to go, but who in the world will I get for to-night? I'll have to visit the theatrical bureaus at once and try and find a quick study."

"I might double up," said Miss Ellis, thoughtfully; "still, I'm too big for the part. Oh, Marion, if we could only find the mascot again! You know, the part really calls for a small person!"

"Great Scott! And lose the props! I guess not!" laughed Bert. "The kid has got my watch and the masher's diamond ring. That is quite enough for him to make out of one company."

"Are you sure he stole your watch, Bert?" asked the doctor, soberly.

"As sure as I can be," was Bert's answer. "I found out where he lived through another kid on the street, and early this morning I called on his mother."

"Oh, Bert! What is she like?" asked Marion, eagerly.

"Did she have the watch, and was 'Jackets' there?" broke in Miss Ellis.

"Are they awfully poor, as the letter says, and does the kid come honestly by his traits?" added Mr. Temple.

"Hold on! One at a time, please!" said the comedian, laughing. "They are very poor; no doubt about that, and 'Jackets' was not there; but that did not matter. His mother says that he is a thief, and his mother is a lady!"

"What!"

Alma Allyn made the exclamation, but every one present echoed it.

Bert laughed again as he looked at their faces.

"And she was an actress once; no doubt about it," he went on, excitedly. "Her name is Ida Inez, and she's as pretty as a picture. Some rich man wrecked her life, and she has worked in the mills ever since! Poor thing! She loves 'Jackets,' and yet she knows that he is a thief! Oh, she broke down completely when she told me about him! She says she has kept silent so long that it has almost killed her!"

"But the watch? Had she seen it?" asked the doctor, anxiously.

"No. 'Jackets' never brings home the things that he steals, but the extraordinary child tells her all about them."

"And doesn't she reason with him and teach him?" asked Marion, quickly.

Bert shook his head.

"The child is a 'pervert,' his mother says. She insists upon it that he hasn't any conscience!"

Marion shuddered with horror, and even Miss Allyn gasped. She had heard of infant wonders, but this boy was of a different order.

"I should like to see that woman," she said, decidedly, "and I would like to see more of that boy, if it is possible."

"We must see them! I shall feel dreadfully if we can't," cried Marion. "Oh, I am sure if I could have 'Jackets' for a while I could make him different. I will not believe he is beyond redemption!"

"You could reform him, if any one could, I am sure," said the doctor, gazing at the beautiful, flushed face; "but before we visit our mascot's mother, we must help Mr. Temple. Miss Watson's place must be filled before the morning rehearsal."

"Oh, Mr. Temple! I have a scheme!" cried Marion, gayly. "If this woman is an actress, perhaps she would do! Please try and remember if you ever heard of her!"

For a moment no one answered Marion's wild suggestion; then Mr. Temple stroked his mustache in a thoughtful manner.

"I never heard of 'Ida Inez,'" he began, when Bert interrupted.

"She is little and pretty, and I'm sure she will do," he said, slowly; "but I'll be jiggered if I want that kid in the company! Why, he'd steal a fellow's eye-teeth if his mouth was open!"

"I'll try the bureaus first," said Mr. Temple, decidedly; "but, if I find no one to suit, we will call on this woman."

Bert drew a long sigh and started for the door.

"'Self-protection is the first law of nature,'" he said, laughingly. "I do not intend to report my loss to the police, but I think it's about time I had the lock turned on 'Jackets!'"

"Oh, no, Bert! Wait!" cried Marion, with a smile on her lips.

Bert dropped back into his chair and picked up his napkin.

"At your request, my dear Marion, I'll defer it," he said, glibly: "or, at least, I'll postpone it until after breakfast."

CHAPTER X.

"JACKETS" IN TROUBLE.

The entire company was assembled on the stage of the empty theatre when Mr. Temple entered, bringing Ida Inez with him.

She was small and pretty, as Bert had said, but her face was pale from hours of suffering, and the wild look in her big, blue eyes showed plainly that she was frightened.

As Mr. Temple introduced her, Marion went to her at once. It did not seem possible to her that this girlish creature could be the little street gamin's mother.

There were tears upon her cheeks which the young girl did not understand until the rehearsal was over and they were in the dressing room together.

"You have been crying," she said to her, sweetly, as she closed the door. "Are you glad to get back to the stage again, or is it from some other reason?"

Ida Inez looked into the sweet face and then burst into tears.

"Oh, I am so glad to get back! But that is not all, Miss Marlowe! I am so grateful to Mr. Jackson for sparing my poor baby!"

"Tell me about him," whispered Marion, as she sat down by the woman's side. "I did like him so much, and I am so sorry for you! I should feel it such an honor if you would give me your confidence."

The woman drew away with a horrified gesture.

"Oh, I wish I could! I wish I could tell you all!" she sobbed out, pitifully. "But I can't! I can't! I have given my promise! Oh, Miss Marlowe, I am a wretchedly guilty creature! I do not half deserve your pity!"

"You mean because of your sin," whispered Marion, in some perplexity. "Bert told me your story, as much as you told him, and I would be so glad to help you."

Ida Inez turned to her suddenly with eager eyes; Marion's face was beaming with innocent compassion.

Oh, if she only dared to tell her the truth!

The thought flashed through her brain and was followed by another. What would happen to her child if she disobeyed the man who hated her?

She set her teeth firmly. Her child came first. She must sacrifice everything, even Marion, on the altar of her mother's duty.

"Listen," she said, more calmly. "I will tell you this! I have defied him in one thing, Miss Marlowe! He made me promise that I would always work in the mill, and, oh, the threats that he made if I dared to disobey him! Yet, for my baby's sake, because I must try to save him, I have accepted this offer to come back to the profession."

It was a lie in part, yet how she wished it were all truth! As the words left her lips, she could have cried out in her anguish.

"Then this man, your boy's father, is alive," said Marion, anxiously.

A dark frown crossed the woman's brow.

"He is alive and he is a villain!" she muttered, between her teeth; "but, oh, how I have lied that his child should not know it!"

The tears rolled down her cheeks, and Marion wept in sympathy.

"It is horrible, such slavery!" she said, indignantly. "You should never have made such a promise!"

"Ah! I could not help it! I loathe him!" murmured the weeping woman, "but I loved him once, oh, so dearly, Miss Marlowe! I loved him in all his vileness, for I was too innocent to see it!"

"Poor girl! I pity you!" was Marion's low answer; "but cheer up, and when your boy comes back, bring him straight to me. I cannot help thinking that I can influence him a little."

"You are so good and kind," whispered the poor girl, sadly. "Why, Miss Marlowe, I am only twenty-four, yet look at my face! It is as thin and hollow as any old woman's!"

"A little happiness, a little freedom from fear, will bring your beauty back," was Marion's answer; "and you are very pretty now, Ida, so do not lose courage."

Ida Inez, as she called herself, clenched her thin fingers together. There was a struggle going on in her breast that was fast overwhelming her. She had written to this girl to awaken her interest, to meet her face to face, if possible, so that she might aid in her undoing. But now that she knew her, the task was impossible. Even with the thought of her child's danger to goad her on, she could not bring herself to perform the treacherous deed which Dan Hobart had exacted of her.

Alma Allyn came into the dressing-room just then, so the conversation ended, but poor Ida's every look showed the turbulence of her emotions.

What would be the outcome of her daring act?

As she read her lines during the rehearsal, the question had stared her in the face. Now, as she lingered in the dressing-room, the horror of it haunted her.

Marion and her friend went out and left her for a moment and, suddenly, like one awakening from sleep, she shook off her indecision.

Standing before Marion's picture, she raised her right hand to heaven, while her lips moved silently.

Come what would, she would stoop to no such perfidy as this!

No innocent girl should be wronged by her aid; no, nor led into temptation, if she could prevent it!

After that she was calm outwardly, but there was still a chill at her heart. As they were parting at the stage door, she whispered her fears to Marion.

"Please, Miss Marlowe, tell them all to call me Ida Inez," she said, eagerly. "You see, if he finds me, he will force me to go back to the mill. He does not intend that I shall ever escape him!"

She could look the beautiful girl squarely in the eyes now, for she had freed herself of her guilty conscience.

"And your boy? Has he power over him?" asked Marion, quickly.

The woman shook her head.

"It is only me that he owns, soul and body," she said, with a blush of shame; "but if I can find my boy, I will tie him hand and foot, if necessary, and take him away from St. Paul by force, so that he will be safe from that monster—the man whose evil nature has been reproduced in my poor little baby!"

Marion's heart grew sick at the fearful statement, and the words haunted her for hours, they were so cruelly truthful.

As they were walking to the hotel, she repeated the conversation to Miss Allyn; she needed her friend's advice in her new determination.

"We must help her to escape him," she said, in conclusion. "Now, if we could only find 'Jackets,' but he has hidden himself, she says. He knew of Bert's visit to his mother, and I suppose he thinks we are after him."

"And so we are, but only for his good," said Miss Allyn, laughing. "We are his friends, not his enemies, if he only knew it."

"Oh, Alma!" cried Marion, suddenly. "If we could only bring him to justice! The man, I mean, who wrecked Ida's life! Why, if he is rich, he should educate and support his child! If he is respected, he should be exposed! If he is guilty, he should be punished! The poor girl says she is in danger of her life! The day she mentions his name he has threatened to kill her!"

Miss Allyn gasped! It seemed too horrible to be true. She was about to reply, when a piercing scream startled them.

"It's 'Jackets'! Come quick!" cried Marion, as she darted down the street.

Miss Allyn raced after her and, in a minute, they turned a corner.

"Jackets" was there, wriggling like an eel, in the hands of a big policeman, while a dozen men and women were looking on gleefully.

"That's the kid! Take him in, officer!" said a businesslike-looking man, who was searching through his pockets. "I felt his hand slip into my pocket as slick as anything! Why, any other day in the week he might have pinched a thousand dollars!"

"Has he took anything now?" asked the officer, who was having all he could do to manage "Jackets."

"No, I think not," said the man, who had made an inventory of his possessions, "but he's a bad egg, officer! I insist upon your arresting him!"

"Can't do it, if he ain't stole nothing," said the officer, grimly; "I'll have to let him go, unless you can prove something agin him."

"Please don't let him go! Please give him to me!" cried Marion, springing forward. "Oh, Mr. Officer, I know his mother; she is a friend of mine! Do, please, give me the boy and let me take him to his mother!"

At the first sound of her sweet voice, "Jackets" ceased his struggles. The next minute he was eyeing her with a shrewd look on his small features.

"Are you sure you can manage him, miss?" asked the officer, a little anxiously. "He's ripped my coat open and he scratches like a wild-cat. I have a notion to spank him before I hand him over!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Marion; but Miss Allyn burst out laughing.

"It's exactly what he needs! But don't do it, officer! It might break the charm, if you spanked our mascot!"

The people who had gathered all stared at her words, but the next minute Marion had "Jackets" by the hand and was leading him away in triumph.

"That gal can tame him, if anybody can," was the "bluecoat's" comment. "She may be an actress; I've been told that she was, but there's one thing dead sure—she's got the face of an angel!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLOT OF A FIEND.

It was the forenoon of the fourth day of Marion's stay in St. Paul, and the entire theatrical company, 'Jackets' and his mother included, were driving about the city.

They had been gazing upon the picturesque Mississippi from St. Anthony's Hill, and were talking eagerly of the beauties of the city as they turned from Summit avenue into one of the pretty streets on their way back to the theatre.

Just as the carriage containing Marion Marlowe, Dr. Brookes, Miss Allyn and Ida Inez passed one of the prominent clubs, Dan Hobart glanced from between the curtains.

A smile of satisfaction lighted his face as he recognized the newsboy's mother. She had kept that much of her promise, and made the acquaintance of Marion.

He glanced at his watch, then turned from the window, only to come face to face with Archibald Tupham.

"Thank fortune, he didn't see her!" was Hobart's first thought. "Time enough for him to learn of it after I have won my wager. He'll all but murder his old sweetheart for playing the traitor."

There was not a trace of pity in his heart for the wretched girl; rather, he seemed chuckling to himself that he had been so clever as to choose the mother of "Jackets" to be his accomplice.

He strolled across the room, nodding familiarly to Tupham, then changed his mind and dropped into a chair beside him.

"Well, the odds are mine," he said, with a faint smile. "I suppose 'Jackets' reported where I left the lady."

If Tupham was annoyed, he did not show it.

"Yes; at the door of the hotel," he answered, coolly. "And the little soubrette stuck to you like a porous plaster! It was worth the twenty I gave her, my boy, I assure you!"

Hobart glanced up quickly.

"So she was working you, too, was she?" he asked, dryly. "Well, she did her work all right, as far as I was concerned. I got the introduction, but you got nothing."

"But a date."

The answer was brief, but Hobart stared a little.

"When?"

"This afternoon! Too late for you to interfere, eh?"

The elder man smiled cynically, as he tapped his vest pocket.

"I can almost feel that fifty," he said, with a laugh; "but I'm willing to confess that Miss Marlowe is balky. She's pretty and she knows it—that is all that is the matter."

Dan Hobart got up and strolled across the floor. As he did so, he glanced up at the clock in a richly-draped alcove.

"Well, so long, Tupham! I have an engagement," he said, indifferently; "I am going to the jeweler's to select what I am to buy with that fifty."

Both men laughed coldly, and Hobart left the room. He was going for a bite of luncheon and then to the home of "Jacket's" mother, where he fully expected to find Marion Marlowe.

At two o'clock exactly he stood before the squalid entrance of a tenement house, but his bird had flown. Mrs. Ida Inez, as she was known, had vacated her apartments.

Dan Hobart's chagrin made him furious for a minute. It was too late now for another attempt to win the wager.

He walked away fuming with baffled

rage; then the old cunning crept back into his eyes, and he hurried back to the club in search of Tupham.

He had something to tell him that would not stand delay. It was that Lottie Evans, the newsboy's mother, had thrown off her shackles.

Like a flash, it came to him exactly what had happened.

The girl had been won over by Marion Marlowe's beauty, and, no doubt, the actress had taken a fancy to her, as she did to "Jackets," and, perhaps, even installed her in some position in the company.

It was only a guess, but it was a plausible one, for Dan Hobart was an adept at reading human nature.

Just once he hesitated. If he could only get hold of "Jackets!" As he had said to Tupham, the child was his most loyal subject.

He stopped at the clubhouse door and revolved the matter in his mind; then a gleam of satisfaction shone in his face—a scheme had sprung into his brain that was well worth trying.

He had about played out his game in that particular city, and the police were growing sufficiently suspicious to make him feel decidedly uneasy.

He had been considering Tupham for some little time, and, now that Tupham seemed about to defeat him in his wager over the actress, the last vestige of that "honor among thieves," which he advocated, disappeared completely.

Here was his chance to get square with a vengeance. He would be a fool, indeed, if he did not take it!

He went into the café and found Tupham seated at one of the tables, and, as he dropped into a chair, he remarked, very coolly:

"By the way, Tupham, that romance of the newsboy's mother came back to my mind last night. I happened to meet her on the street—you know—the girl who died in the slums of Minneapolis."

Archibald Tupham sprang from his chair and then sank back again, while his coarse face turned to a livid purple.

"You met her, the mother of 'Jackets!' How do you know?" he tried to say, calmly.

Hobart lit a cigar and answered without a sign of hesitation.

"As if a man could doubt a woman's word, especially when she is merely claiming the ownership of a child and the identity of that child's father," he said, indifferently.

"Did she tell you that?" questioned Tupham, hoarsely.

Hobart puffed his cigar to see that it was smoking properly, then removed it from his lips with a flourish, as he answered:

"She told me she was Lottie Evans, and I knew the rest," he said, tantalizingly. "I congratulate you on your old sweetheart, Tupham. She must have been very pretty!"

With a cry of rage, Archibald Tupham rose to his feet. He did not make any reply, but walked straight from the clubhouse.

"Now, the rest is easy," whispered Hobart, between his puffs. "My game is to expose Tupham and ruin his reputation. He may compromise and he may not; I'll have to take chances. It's more likely he'll abuse the girl or murder her outright, and, of course, his son and heir, 'Jackets,' will come in as the motive. Once let the kid get the boodle, and Dan Hobart will know what to do. He'll corral kid and all, and make tracks for another city, where business in our line is a little more easy."

He strolled out of the club a little later, and sauntered slowly down the street.

Suddenly some one pulled his coat-tails sharply. He turned and discovered "Jackets."

"I broke away frum 'em, boss," said the boy, with a grin of delight. "Dey can't make no bloomin' jay actor outer dis chicken, you bet! Now, what's de game ter-day, boss? Is der anyting doin'? I'se aint nipped er ting fer two days an' it's er gittin' discouragin'!"

CHAPTER XII.

A DEED OF HONOR.

"He has gone! 'Jackets' has gone! Oh, Bert, what shall we do? The child has run away again, and his poor mother is nearly crazy!"

Marion asked the question with tears in her eyes, as she and Alma met Bert and the doctor in the hotel parlor.

"And to think we only left him with Olcott while we went to see about the carriages!"

"Well, Olcott is a chump, and no mistake!" was Bert's disgusted answer.

"We must get him back, that is all there is about it," went on the young girl, decidedly. "His mother is sure that his father has stolen him: still, I can't help feeling that she is mistaken in that. Why, how could any one know that Ida was determined to leave the city?"

"Oh, he's quietly vamoosed and gone back to selling papers," said the doctor, laughing. "It would be actually impossible to keep that child from the streets. He's a typical gamin. You can't make anything else out of him."

"Well, if it wasn't for our visit to that flour

mill in Minneapolis this afternoon, I'd go straight out and look for him," said Marion, stoutly. "As it is, his mother has gone—I could not stop her. What time are we due at the mill, Mr. Temple?"

The manager had just entered the room and answered her question promptly.

"The owner invited us to bring you at three o'clock," he said, glancing at his watch. "He's a man that I knew nearly twenty years ago. A fine fellow, too; I shall be glad to renew the acquaintance."

"And I shall be glad to see a flour mill," said Miss Allyn, smilingly. "It will be interesting to see where the foundation of the 'staff of life' comes from; also how they make ambitious flour!"

"Alma, what in the world do you mean by 'ambitious flour?'" asked Marion, curiously.

"Self-raising, of course," answered Miss Allyn, loftily. "And, as there's no time to spare, I move that we start instanter."

"Couldn't start, if we didn't move," remarked Bert, good-naturedly.

"Don't be funny, Bert!" laughed Marion. "And now you good people, hurry! I am all ready to go! Perhaps, after all, we'll get back in time to look for 'Jackets.'"

"Let him alone and he'll come home," sang Bert, as he vanished from the parlor.

An hour later a party of six were looking on at a busy scene, and one that was by no means lacking in interest.

They were on the top floor of one of the big flour mills, gazing at an endless chain of buckets which were bringing grain from the long line of canal boats far down below, and dumping it into huge bins, into which the loft seemed sub-divided.

The air was filled with the fine dust from the grain, and here and there were splashes of white, while the slightest touch of a finger dislodged some of the dusty substance.

"It's just a trifle choky, isn't it?" whispered Miss Allyn, as the gentlemen of the party walked on a little distance; "but I'm glad I came, for it's a sight worth seeing, although I must confess I'm a bit tangled on the process of 'high milling.' Let's see, what have I learned, anyway; I'm sure I can't remember. Those were the 'nether millstones' that we saw down below, I suppose, and the 'hopper' is on the floor below us."

"What is that?" asked Marion, with an interested look.

"Oh, I didn't catch it exactly; only these bins, one after another, are emptied into it. I think it has a capacious opening and a small mouth that they call a feeder, and there's a stream of grain running through it all the time when the mill is working."

"I wonder if this is the 'Mill of the Gods,'" spoke up Miss Ellis, laughingly; "you know, they grind slowly, but they grind 'exceeding small.' Kind fate, please deliver me from ever falling into a 'hopper!'"

"Not an easy thing to hop out of," laughed Bert, coming up. Then he gave a little nod toward the mill owner, who was standing at a little distance, talking with Mr. Temple and the doctor.

"A fine man, Mr. Foley," he said, in a low tone, "but they say he has a partner that's a good deal of a rascal. He was just telling Mr. Temple that he wished he could get rid of him."

"What a pity," said Alma Allyn, as Dr. Brookes beckoned to her. "Excuse me a minute, Marion, the doctor wants me. He's going to explain an Archimedean screw or a 'Child's decorticator' for my edification!"

She moved away, laughingly, and Bert went with her, slipping his arm through the *ingénue's* at the same time, so that he could walk between them.

Marion caught sight of something at the other end of the long, narrow aisle between the bins that interested her, and she walked slowly along until she was some distance from them.

Suddenly she heard a sound that almost made her heart stop beating. She stood perfectly still for a minute and, as she heard it again, she was sure that it came from an aisle that crossed at right angles.

Without a thought of the others, she darted forward and, as she turned from the main aisle, she was completely lost to sight from the rest of her party.

The sound that had reached her ears was the cry of a child which was stifled in what seemed to her to be a peculiar manner.

The soft hum of moving grain attracted her as she listened. It had a rushing sound, as if moving with great velocity.

She glanced up, quickly; the bin in front of her was not so high as the others, and there was a narrow ladder leaning against it.

In an instant she was up the steps and peering over the top.

What she saw was merely the contents moving swiftly downward, as though through a trough or monstrous funnel.

The next instant she witnessed a scene that made her heart stand still.

A man's head appeared over the opposite side of the bin; then two hands that were fiercely clutching the struggling form of a boy rose over the rough edge of the board and Marion knew that a child was about to be murdered.

In a second, the blood flew back to the young girl's heart. She took one more

glance and recognized them both. Then her voice rang out in a shriek of warning.

The cry for help rang through the lofty building like a clarion, cutting through the buzz and hum of machinery, until it reached every member of her party.

But the shrill cry came too late! There was a movement of the man's arms and the child was hurled into that moving mass which closed over him greedily, like the jaws of a hungry monster.

Another shriek burst from Marion's lips and was echoed by a dozen voices.

"Quick! Stop it! Shut it off! There's a child in the bin!" she shouted, as she sprang to the floor and darted like an arrow around the aisle toward the murderer.

"Not a step! Don't you dare to run!" she cried, as she came face to face with the fellow in the narrow space. There was a stick of wood lying upon the floor, and she was brandishing it in an instant.

The man uttered a curse, but he fell back at her words. There was something in her face that warned him not to come too near her.

There was a rush of feet behind her, but the young girl did not move until Dr. Brookes and Mr. Temple pressed by on either side of her.

"It's Tupham! Great God!" were the mill-owner's only words. Then he darted away to give imperative orders.

What happened next no one really knew.

Dr. Brookes and Bert pinioned the murderer in their grasp, and then Marion turned suddenly, her face as white as death. As a merciful unconsciousness came over her, she was caught by Mr. Temple.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUSTICE.

Marion's first question when she opened her eyes was for the safety of "Jackets."

She was seated in a little office on the first floor of the mill, and Dr. Brookes and Miss Allyn were bending over her.

Miss Ellis stood near by, with the tears running down her face, but they were soon dried when she saw that Marion was recovering.

"Safe, Marion, dear! Your promptness saved him," was the answer. "Mr. Foley shut the bin off some way, and "Jackets" was dug out. He was badly choked, but not quite smothered."

Marion's joy revived her more than anything else could, and, in a very few minutes, she was leaning on Alma's shoulder.

"And that brute will be wearing a pair of handcuffs now, instead of roses!" laughed Miss Ellis, delightedly. "Oh, I knew him in a minute, didn't you, Dr. Brookes? The idea of his being such a dual creature!"

"Mr. Foley has sent for the police, so he'll be safe very soon," said the doctor, with an anxious glance at Marion. "Are you sure you feel all right now—no faintness at all, Marion?"

"I'm sure I'm all right," was the smiling answer, and then the lovely face clouded with a sudden horror. "Oh, I have thought of something, but no, it is too horrible! Do you know, it flashed into my mind just then that he might be the boy's father! It is a dreadful thought! I must be crazy to think it!"

"I am not so sure," said Miss Allyn, quickly; "but here comes Mr. Foley and the rest of our party!"

"Is she all right?" asked Mr. Temple, looking at Marion. "Ah! I can see that she is! That is a brave girl, Marion! It is no wonder you fainted! The sight must have been horrible!"

"I have thought for a long time that Tupham was a bad man," said Mr. Foley, soberly, "but Heaven knows I did not think him capable of that! Why, the man is the worst of all criminals—a would-be child murderer!"

"Well, we've got him, thanks to Marion; and 'Jackets' is safe," said Bert, with an admiring glance at his old friend. "But here's a conundrum for you to answer: What was 'Jackets' doing over here, anyway?"

Marion and Miss Allyn looked at each other, but neither of them answered.

"We have an idea that we know, but it is a very horrible one," began Miss Ellis, when some one, a woman, appeared suddenly upon the threshold of the office.

"My boy! Where is my boy?" cried Ida Inez, frantically. "I have tracked him here, to the mill. Oh, has any one seen him? Answer my question quick, or I shall go distracted!"

Marion sprang to her feet and put her arms around the woman.

"I will tell you where your boy is, if you will answer my question, Ida," she said, eagerly. "You shall have him in your arms in ten minutes, if you will only do what I ask you."

The poor woman was trembling in every fibre, but, as she clung to Marion, she looked from one to the other.

"What is it that you wish? Oh, I will tell anything, anything, only to know that he is safe; that he has not fallen into the clutches of that villain—his father!"

"You mean Mr. Tupham?"

It was the mill owner who spoke. Even

then the poor, tortured woman would not break her word. She merely glanced at him pleadingly; then her head fell on her bosom.

There was no need for words, and for a moment no one could have spoken if they would. Their hearts seemed frozen from the horror of what had happened.

An hour later they were all back in one of the private parlors of the hotel, and both his mother and Marion were pleading with "Jackets." The boy was thoroughly frightened, and at last he confessed.

He had gone to the mill on a suggestion of Dan Hobart's, and his errand there was to carry a message to Tupham; but as to the nature of the message the boy was totally ignorant.

Then he told of Dan Hobart's vocation in the town, and every detail of his story was accompanied with confessions of his own wickedness.

"He's got yer watch, boss, an' ther diamond ring," he said, in conclusion. "If youse go quick, youse kin find 'em in his room at de hotel. He's plannin' ter fly de coop, an' he wuz ergoin' ter take dem t'ings wid him."

That last bit of information settled Dan Hobart's fate.

While he was at a lawyer's office, plotting to destroy his rival, his rooms were being searched for ill-gotten plunder.

The next time the two rascals met, it was in the corridor of the jail, on the fifth evening of Marion's engagement in the city.

If they thought of their wicked wager, neither showed it in their glances. They merely glared at each other like two hungry tigers.

With Marion beside her, poor Lottie Evans told her story, and enlisted the sympathy of an interested judge in her favor.

Mr. Tupham was a married man, and had a family to claim his fortune, but, if the law could do it, "Jackets" should be provided for. It was a case that would take time, and, perhaps, even then be unsuccessful. No one cared for that, now that "Jackets" was saved. His mother scorned the mill-owner's money for herself, and it mattered little about her baby. She was a free woman now, and she could work to support him.

"It is strange how all criminals defeat their own ends ultimately," remarked Mr. Foley, as they were all together a day or two later. "Why my partner, Mr. Tupham, learned that Temple and I were old friends, and it was he who suggested the invitation which I extended. Of course, he did not anticipate a visit from 'Jackets,' but now the mystery is, what was his motive? Why was he so anxious for me to send you that invitation?"

"Jackets," who was listening, took it upon himself to reply.

"I'se kin tell yer, boss! Dere wuz a wager 'tween him an' dat scallerwag, Hobart! Dey bot' on 'em bet er fifty dat dey'd win Miss Marler, by hook or by crook, dat's wot dey sed, an' w'en Hobart took her ter dinner wid de soobret dat night de——"

Marion gave a scream that startled everyone. It was her first true knowledge of the identity of Miss Watson's lover.

"I guess we understand it all now," said Dr. Brookes, angrily. "Tupham was determined to get an introduction to Marion some way, and he thought that it could be accomplished through that visit to the mill. Then, when he saw his son, he remembered his fury toward the boy's mother, and his evil passions overpowered him—that was the climax of his destiny."

"No, the climax will be a rope," spoke up Bert, with a knowing look. "The authorities are finding out things that will probably hang him."

Though Dr. Brookes' theory seemed a plausible one, none of the company ever learned the true reason for Tupham's fiendish deed. It came out later that Tupham suspected his son, "Jackets," of having told Hobart the facts concerning "Lottie Evans." He was aware, too, that if "Jackets" knew the facts he must have been told them by his mother. This only made him more furious toward the lad's mother, and toward "Jackets" himself. Besides, Tupham was a desperate man, and would commit any deed rather than have the story of his double life made known. So when he caught sight of the boy in the mill, and near one of the bins, Tupham probably acted on the impulse of the moment in taking this opportunity to end the boy's life.

"Well, Ida is safe from his clutches, and so is 'Jackets,' said Marion, thankfully. "So our engagement in St. Paul has been very successful."

"Well, I never wish to visit a flour mill again!" cried Miss Ellis, shivering.

"I'll never eat bread without thinking of poor 'Jackets,'" chimed in Miss Allyn.

"Why not look at it all in exactly the opposite light?" suggested Marion, sweetly. "Our visit to the flour mill was the greatest blessing that could come to us. It resulted in the rescuing of both "Jackets" and his mother, as well as in the downfall of two precious rascals!"

"Marion is right—as usual!" said Dr. Brookes, admiringly. "Let us try to banish the horror, and live only in the results that have been accomplished."

There was an affectionate glance between

Marion and the doctor, and then the company separated to get ready for the next performance.

Ida Inez played her part excellently that night, and it was plain to them all that she was a valuable addition to the company.

Miss Watson had vanished completely from their gaze, but, while Marion pitied, she did not regret her.

The story of the flour-mill tragedy crept into all of the papers, and Marion's deed came in for a large share of praise from all sides.

THE END.

In Omaha, where Marion Marlowe made her next appearance, she had an exciting series of adventures, due to her falling into a trap laid for some one else. These adventures will be told in the next number of MY QUEEN (No. 22.) The story will be entitled, "Marion Marlowe in Omaha; or, Held Up by Accident." Read the thrilling episode of the wreck of the company on the way to Omaha, of the strange admirer of Marion, and what followed his offer to take the company for a drive, and of the terrible dilemma Marion found herself in—all contained in next week's MY QUEEN.

PATTERN COLUMN.

By special arrangements with the manufacturers we are enabled to supply the readers of MY QUEEN with the patterns of all garments described or illustrated in this column at TEN CENTS each. Address, "Pattern Column," MY QUEEN, 238 William Street, New York City.

☞ *In ordering patterns be sure to give size and number*

FASHION NOTES.

A lovely evening gown of pale pink crepe has a flounce to the knee of Renaissance lace embroidered with pink chenille and black flitter. The corsage is a square bolero of the embroidered lace over pink crepe, embroidered with lovers' knots of black chenille. The embroidered lace is used for a girdle fastened at a point in front by a knot of pink and black chenille, ending in long streamers.

Fancy hosiery is the rule among fashionable women. For dress occasions very little black is worn, unless it is in lace patterns. Showy figures are used to a large extent, although lace patterns in silk and lisle are often preferred. Popular shoes show three varieties of heels. The low, broad style for rough use; the Cuban heel for more dressy occasions, and the Louis Quinze for slippers and indoor wear.

A pretty novelty for belts and wristbands is the silk trimmings, four or five inches wide, with several rows of narrow Persian strips in white, blue, red and beige. Many of these bands are rich plain colors, embroidered in chenille effects. A novelty in silk braids is a three-inch width in a diamond basket weave, shot with either gold or silver. Other black velvet trimming bands come in scalloped effects, embroidered with French knots in gold.

The tailor-finished shirt-waists of soft, light wool or French flannel, although not as dainty and airy in effect as the summer styles, have their own special attractions. At all the importing houses are now exhibited the new winter models in delicate pastel shades and in Roman red, cream-color and black. They are taut and shapely in style, and will prove most useful during the entire season, as independent waists to wear with different skirts of silk or wool, or as a finish for open-fronted cloth jackets of various kinds and colors.

No. 2398—LOOSE JACKET FOR SMALL GIRLS

This comfortable jacket is shown in tan cloth, with a darker shade for the turnover collar and ruffle. The jacket is three-quarter length, and is shaped by under-arm gores and a center back seam. The coat can be made in kersey, melton, cheviot, cloth or other eloaking materials.

The pattern is cut in sizes 6 to 12 years. Size 10 requires four and three-quarters yards of 21-inch, two and five-eighths yards of 42-inch, or two and one-quarter yards of 54-inch material. As shown, one and five-eighths yards of 54-inch, with 1 yard of velvet.

No. 2,405—FANCY WAIST WITH PAQUIN SLEEVE.

(For young girls.)

This handsome waist is made showing a bolero and paquin sleeve. It is represented in blue taffeta, with a tucked yoke and the collar decorated with ribbon velvet. The sleeve is quite new, and pretty. The upper portion is tucked from the elbow up, and the fullness below is gathered to form a puff.

The pattern is cut in sizes 12 to 16 years. Size 14 requires two and three-eighth yds of 21-inch, with 1 yard of all-over, three-fourth yard of velvet and one and one-fourth yards of trimming.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY

GRACE SHIRLEY

NOTE.—This department is a special feature of this publication, and it will be appreciated, we feel sure, by all our readers. It is conducted by Miss Shirley, whose remarkable ability to answer all questions, no matter how delicate the import, is well known. Readers of "MY QUEEN" need not hesitate to write her on any subject. Miss Shirley will have their interests at heart and will never refuse her assistance or sympathy. As all letters are answered only through the columns of "MY QUEEN," it is unnecessary to enclose stamps.

Do not be impatient if your letter does not appear as soon as you wish. Scores of letters have reached us ahead of yours, and these must be answered in the order in which they are received. Besides, the enormous circulation of "MY QUEEN" renders it necessary that we should have the letters in hand some time before the date of issue. All letters to "MY QUEEN" are answered, so your query and its answer is bound to appear in due time. STREET & SMITH.

"I am twenty years old and have never had a lover. I like young men, but don't seem to capture any one. I live up-stairs, and at ten o'clock one night after turning out the gas I sat on the landing. There was a young man came up that I was slightly acquainted with. He sat down for a chat. Now, ought I to have risen and opened our door or was it proper to sit there in the dark with him? SARATOGA."

You have plenty of years before you in which to capture a lover. We do not see anything radically wrong in your sitting in the dark with a young man, under the circumstances you mention. The man that one cannot trust in the dark would be likely to be untrustworthy in the light. As a rule, though, it is always wise to receive your callers in a lighted room in your home, particularly if, as you say in this case, you are only "slightly acquainted" with him.

"I am a young man of twenty-one—weigh 162 pounds—considered very handsome. Have an exceedingly good education, but some people seem to dislike me for some cause. I am honest and upright, have no bad habits, am pleasant but poor. I have met some girls that liked me at first, but soon became tired of me. Will you please give me your advice. I am continually longing for the love and confidence of some true little girl. Will you tell me how to gain the good will of others? GRANT I."

You have written us a manly, straightforward letter and that makes it hard for us to understand your position. A man really possessing the good qualities you mention ought to have no trouble in making acquaintances.

It is just possible that you are too much interested in your own affairs. Try to become interested in other people, their aims and ambitions and, perhaps, you will be more attractive to them. A thoroughly self-contained man is seldom interesting to others.

"I have been married for two years, and was contented and happy until my husband began going out and leaving me alone three and more nights a week. Then two women came and told me (what I afterward learned was true) that my husband had been going around with their daughter and sister for seven months. I confronted him with this and he promised that it should not happen again. But when he wants a night or evening out I cannot control my feelings and by the time he comes home I am almost in hysterics. Should I trust him and let him go out evenings or do you think a man that does that is not to be trusted? MRS. ALEXANDER W."

We wish that some of the young girls who write us that they are anxious to get married could meet you and realize what a serious matter matrimony really is. We are sincerely sorry for you. Your husband has evidently given you cause to doubt his sincerity, and when doubt once enters into one's home the spell is broken. You might endeavor to make your home so attractive to your husband that he will have small incentive to go elsewhere. If you do your utmost in this respect, and it fails to accomplish your purpose, it would be doubtful whether it was worth while to waste any more time or thought upon him.

"I am in love with a young lady and as I have no other way to spend the evenings I call on her three times a week. She likes to go to some quiet spot where we can be away from every one, but her parents object and have said if I could not see her at home not to call on her at all. Do you think they are right? R. S."

We think this young lady's parents are perfectly right. The place for you to call upon her or any other young woman is at her own home. We judge from your letter that your trips to "quiet spots" are more her fault than your own, but you ought not to consent to anything of this sort when you know that it is contrary to her parents' desires. We advise you to talk the matter over with her and show her how much more sensible it would be to fulfil the requirements of etiquette.

"I am a girl of sixteen and am called very pretty. I do not go with the boys and do not care

a snap of my finger for them. Some of my girl friends call me an old maid. Do you think I will ever go with the boys and care anything for them, and do you think they will care anything for me? ELIZABETH R."

You will not deserve the name of "an old maid" until you are twenty years older and you need not care if your girl friends try to plague you now. There is abundance of time for you to "care for" the boys and you will probably find plenty of them that will care for you in the years to come.

"I am very much in love with the stage, but hate to act, for I have a cast in one eye. I have a good figure and am called pretty and can sing a little. I am very poor, but I love the stage. Please tell me what to do.

"A STAGE-STRUCK GIRL."

We would advise you to think of some other means of livelihood. The physical defect which you mention would probably debar you from prominence on the stage, and any girl is foolish to choose a career in which she has no chance to advance. Theatrical life demands more of its devotees than almost any other, and a place among the mediocre actresses is only gained at the expense oftentimes of years of arduous study and laborious toil.

"I have been reading your advice to the young people and find that each reply coincides with my views, therefore the following appeal to you, as I am at a loss as to the right course to pursue. In your reply to Inez C. in No. 7 of 'My Queen' I find you are not explicit enough for me to understand your views on the marriage of cousins.

"Our case is dissimilar to that of 'Inez C.' in that we have loved each other devotedly for two years, also that our relationship is third instead of second cousins. After reading the following in your advice to Inez C., viz.: 'We do not understand how any young girl dare shoulder such a burden,' we hesitate before taking such a serious step. Please explain fully and advise us as to the right course to pursue. FRANK."

As you say, your case is not similar to that of "Inez C." She was by no means sure that she was in love. You seem to be sure of this, and you have apparently considered the matter very sensibly and coolly. The degree of relationship existing between yourself and your fiancee is so slight that we doubt whether you will go far wrong if you allow affection to determine your decision. If you have stuck to each other for two years in spite of your doubts, certainly Grace Shirley will not stand in the way of your happiness.

"I have been married about one year, have furnished a nice home and done everything to make our life pleasant. Yet my wife makes it very disagreeable, and we have frequent quarrels. She gets angry very easily. She insists on my kissing and caressing her every time I come home or leave the house, and she wants me with her every leisure moment. She also neglects her housework and generally has some of her work for me to do when I come home. These things make me feel disgusted, and I am afraid if it continues I will lose my love and respect for her. Please advise me what to do. WM. S. B."

We would advise you to talk the matter over with your wife quietly and calmly. Show her how your frequent quarrels will affect your future and then take pains yourself to avoid any more quarrels. We believe you can prevent these if you try, for some of them, at least, must be your fault. Your wife seems to be very affectionate. Try to appreciate this at its full value, and to return it. It is really a sign of the esteem in which she holds you. We are not sure that she is obliged to do housework. Why do you not hire a servant to do this for her? If you do not earn enough money to pay a servant, we see no reason why you should not assist her in doing it. Do not be too anxious to find fault with her—it is more than possible that the blame lies with yourself.

"I am nineteen years of age and have been living in this town about ten years. My parents are poor, though father and myself earn enough to keep us in good circumstances as regards a good home and decent wearing apparel. Since I became eighteen I have been trying to go in good society—that is, with the best girls. The boys with whom I associate get invitations and go out to nearly all the little evening parties, and have good times generally with the girls, but I am never invited.

"While I am telling my 'tale of woe,' it may be well for me to state that I am a printer, and it may be that that has something to do with it, though, since I began six years ago I have risen from 'devil' to foreman of the office and am getting a very good salary.

"There is one girl I want to gain the respect of, and have tried in every way, but my efforts seem to have been wasted. I have written her several notes to take her to church or to the theatre, but she has always declined in about this way: 'Circumstances are so I cannot accompany you this evening.' GEORGE K."

Your letter has interested us greatly. We cannot understand why you should be "turned down" as continually as you state. Suppose you give up seeking Society for a time and see whether Society will not seek you. Such things often go by contraries, and the experiment is worth a trial. We should not think that your occupation had anything to do with it, for you are certainly an industrious young man or you would not have risen as rapidly as you have.

In regard to the young lady you mention, we would advise you to let this matter work out its own salvation. We certainly would not continue to pursue her with invitations that are so persistently declined. Be manly about the matter and do not lose your dignity. Perhaps before long things will begin to "come your way" and you are young enough to be able to afford to wait.

"I am perplexed in regard to my feeling for a young man of my acquaintance. I do not know

whether I am in love with him or not. I am unable to think calmly when he is around and when he is absent I find my mind full of thoughts of him. Has he hypnotized me or am I in love with him? I am seventeen years old and have never felt this way about any man before.

"FLORENCE S. C."

We do not think that hypnotism would produce any such effect as you describe, and we doubt very much whether you are in love. You have probably allowed yourself to think too much about this one man. You are too young to be dreaming about love affairs, and we advise you to put all thoughts of such matters resolutely out of your mind for several years, at least.

"I need advice and have no one to whom I can go for it. Do you care to help one of your boy readers?

"I will state my case as briefly as possible. I am twenty-four years old and have been a widower five years. My people are wealthy and desire that I should come home and marry a girl they have selected for me. I have been a wanderer for over four years, have been all over this country and have met and been entertained by a great number of people. I do not love the girl in question, and I do not think it possible for me to love any one in that way. I believe it would be an injustice to the lady for me to marry her. Please give me your opinion. WILL R S."

Never marry to please others; it is not only a folly but a sin. Cupid can make all the matches without any assistance from outsiders. State your case firmly to those who seem desirous of managing your affairs. You are quite right in thinking it would be an injustice to the girl. It would be worse than that, it would be a downright sin against her.

"Your advice is so sensible and good that I must ask you to favor me with it. I am fond of a girl who is very young, but she is so pretty and has such a sweet disposition that I really believe I love her. Her father dislikes me and has forbidden her to speak to me. I feel that I can not give her up. She is the prettiest girl I ever saw, and if I had two of her pictures, I would send you one of them. She is only ten years old, so, of course, I cannot marry her for many years yet, but I really think I could wait. I am twenty-one myself, and have a good home. Would you advise me to try to keep up her acquaintance? I think she cares for me. If I deserve to be rebuked do not hesitate to say so.

"E. G. A."

Your letter is not deserving of rebuke. On the contrary, it is very novel and interesting. It must certainly be a very delightful experience to fall in love with a little girl of ten and watch her develop into the young woman whom you desire to marry, but we would not advise you to expect too much from your little pet, as her opinions may change a great many times before she arrives at a marriageable age.

"I am deeply in love with a nice young girl of seventeen. She is very good looking, and I have known her for a year and a half. I have no bad habits and have always been kind and polite to her. We used to go together, but of late she won't even speak to me. Her father is a partner in a dry goods store. We were out walking one evening, and she said 'Wouldn't it be fine to go out of town and get married?'

"I said, 'Yes, let's elope.' Now she won't go anywhere with me, and is always with other fellows. I never could get her to stay out after nine-thirty, and now I see her out till ten o'clock with other fellows. I get twenty dollars a month and could take care of her nicely. Please tell me how I can win back her love. ARTHUR H."

The young lady has probably experienced a "change of heart" and we earnestly recommend that you "go and do likewise." We do not see how you can possibly dream of marriage on twenty dollars a month, and advise you to think it over very seriously before you ask any young girl to share such a small sum with you. We judge by your letter that you are very young, and we are happy to congratulate you on your lack of bad habits.

"I am only married since September and yet I am unhappy. My husband is a sailor and makes very good wages. I love him very dearly, in fact, I could not live without him. My trouble is this: He gives me from twenty-five to thirty-five dollars every two or three weeks, besides buying everything I need to eat and wear. Yet I have to send to him for more money before he comes home. What can I do to be more economical? I am afraid he will tire of such an expensive wife. I would not displease him for anything. He never asks me what I do with a cent—in fact, I really don't know myself. I am only nineteen, and I know this is a bad beginning, but I have always had plenty of money. I am very much interested in sweet Marion Marlowe.

"EDYTHE R."

If your husband knew when he married you that you were accustomed to having a good deal of money to spend, it is hardly probable that he will chide you for using the amount you mention. However, we advise you to only buy the things that are necessary for a woman in your station in society.

"Two years ago I was going with a young man who said he loved me and that he would own me some day. Long after that we quarreled. He said we would begin afresh on New Year's Day and I said if we did not begin now we would never begin, so he never came back. I still love him. He is going with my best lady friend now. When I met him last he said he wanted me to leave town because I was getting a bad name by going to dances. He said if I would go away and be a good girl for a year that he would marry me. He is still going with my lady friend, but he thinks I am going away. What would you do? Do you think he still loves me? I have no mother to go to. L. M. M."

We can hardly understand such a condition of affairs as you mention in your letter. If going to dances is "giving you a bad name," why do you not discontinue the practice at once? It does not seem to us that this young man really loves you. If he did, he would not pay attention to another girl when he could have your company.

"I have read a few of the Marion Marlowe books and they are real good. I have been in love with a girl about two years, but the last eighteen months she has not seemed to care for me. At first she seemed to worship me almost, and then she quit me cold and I have been trying to find out why she did it, but she won't talk, and refuses to see me. I am sick at heart, I love her so much. There is another girl here who loves me dearly, although I have never shown her any marked attention. Would you advise me to try to win the first girl back or try to love the other girl. She is a good girl and ought not to be made to suffer. EDGAR F."

We do not advise any young person to waste valuable time mourning for that which is unattainable. No doubt, the second young lady is quite as lovable as the first, and, if you think you could love her, it might be well to try. Perhaps, after all, she is your real affinity.

"I am an interested reader of the book 'My Queen,' and looking over the letters from the people I saw Ella P.'s letter and as I am looking for a lady correspondent, I thought I would ask as a favor from you to send me her address.

"I am a hypnotist and am very fond of the ladies, so if you will please send me her name and address I will be under obligations to you. I am twenty years old, good looking and sociable. "GEORGE F."

The correspondence department of "My Queen" is not a matrimonial bureau, George, and Grace Shirley does not divulge the names of those who write for her advice

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"I am a young girl twenty years old. I am in love with two young men and they both love me. I have known the first one for over a year; he does not write to me. The second one I met four weeks ago, and he almost asked me to be his loving wife. When he came to call on me I was not home. I love him dearly. I am a very affectionate girl, and have lots of admirers. I am short but sweet, the boys say. Please tell me which one I shall choose for my true and loving husband. I am very anxious to get married. Please tell me what I must do. LETITIA V. B."

You seem to be sadly afflicted with the fever of love, Letitia, and we wish sincerely that we could have a nice long talk with you From your letter it is evident that you look upon marriage very lightly. Is it possible you have not seen the misery all about you that has its root in hasty, ill-advised marriages? Try to think less of what the "boys say" and more of your dignity and duty as a woman. Love and marriage should only be considered by those who appreciate the obligations which accompany these conditions, and a girl who loves two men cannot be very serious, for true, genuine affection for one would make the other impossible.

"I married young, but lost my husband and children a few years later. I remained a widow some years and had accumulated quite a competence when I foolishly married again. Since then (ten years now) I have nearly had to support my husband. He always held to a woman he represented to be his daughter. She is forty years old and has always led a dissolute life. The result is that seven weeks ago my husband left me and I have not seen him since.

"MRS. L. E. W."

The best advice that we can give you is to let your husband go his way and to take care of yourself irrespective of him. Every moment's thought that you spend upon him is so much time wasted. We cannot understand why you should desire the return of a man whom you "have nearly had to support."

"After being married about three months my husband tells me that he has a common-law wife and two children whom he lived with for five years previous to marrying me. Kindly relieve my anxiety by telling me if my marriage is legal or if she can make any claim upon him. If my marriage is not legal in this State would it be in any other? R. A."

We are very sorry for you in your unhappy position, but are unable to advise you in the matter. The only thing for you to do is to consult a good lawyer without delay.

"Several of us girls here read 'My Queen,' as soon as it gets in town and we all think Miss Marlowe is just lovely.

"I have one of the strictest parents there is, I think. He wishes me to go to school, but does not care to provide the necessaries for my education. As I have a good deal of trouble about it, I wish you would give me your advice and ideas about it. DAISY B."

We are gratified to learn that you enjoy "My Queen" so much and our opinion of Marion is exactly the same as yours. It is certainly hard work to get one's education under difficulties, but we advise you to persevere and learn all you can, even if the circumstances are uncomfortable. Why do you not try to talk the matter over with your father and show him just how he is making it hard for you to gain your education? If you put it to him in the right light, you might find him very reasonable.

"We have read all of your Marion Marlowe stories and are dead in love with them and now we are going to ask your advice. We are acquainted with a young lady similar to Marion and are both in love with her and have both proposed to her but she would not accept either of us, saying she did not wish to hurt the other's feelings, as we were both very dear to her. We are drawing the same salary and board at the same place and are very good friends, but neither of us wish to give her up. The young lady and ourselves have decided to act on your advice.

"ROY AND DAVE."

"They are both good-looking and respectable young men, and I think lots of both. CARRIE."

This is the first time since our correspondence department began that we have been able to learn "both sides of the story," and can congratulate you on being such a sort of mutual admiration society. My advice to Ray and Dave is to wait patiently and let the young lady decide between you and I would suggest to Carrie that

she decide as soon as possible, in order to end the suspense, which must be decidedly uncomfortable. Candidly, though, we can discover no evidences of real love in the young lady's statement so, perhaps, if you young men were to devote a little time to some other young lady, it might help Carrie to make her decision more promptly.

"Do you think there is any harm in flirting, Miss Shirley? I met a very handsome gentleman in the cars the other day, and after coughing two or three times to attract my attention, he smiled and raised his hat to me. After that he came over and sat by me and we talked all the way to Harlem. I did not dare tell mama or papa. This gentleman wishes me to go to the theatre with him. Do you think it would be wrong? He seems to be a very nice gentleman." ELLEN F. C."

My dear little girl, you have done very wrong indeed! In a great city like New York, where there are so many worse than beasts, prowling around in man's attire, a young girl almost takes her life in her hands when she makes indiscriminate acquaintances. No gentleman would ever dream of acting in this way, so the man you met cannot be a gentleman, and it is our opinion that you would not be safe with him a minute Tell your parents all about it at once so that in future they will protect you when you are traveling about the city, or else make up your mind never to see this man again, and never, never to make another acquaintance in that manner!

"I have a question to ask you. Is it proper for a father and mother to be in the same room with a girl and her lover? MARIE G."

We can see no reason why it is not. The society of your father and mother ought certainly to be congenial to both you and your lover. Young folks often make the mistake of being alone together too much. Probably it is just as well for you that this is not possible in your case. We would advise you both to endeavor to make your society agreeable to your parents.

"Please tell me whether it is proper for a girl to kiss a gentleman caller before he leaves. I mean one who is a good friend. CORA W."

We do not believe in young women being too generous with their kisses. We do not think that an occasional friendly kiss bestowed as a favor is improper, but they should be granted sparingly. As a rule, a woman ought to reserve her caresses for her fiance or husband.

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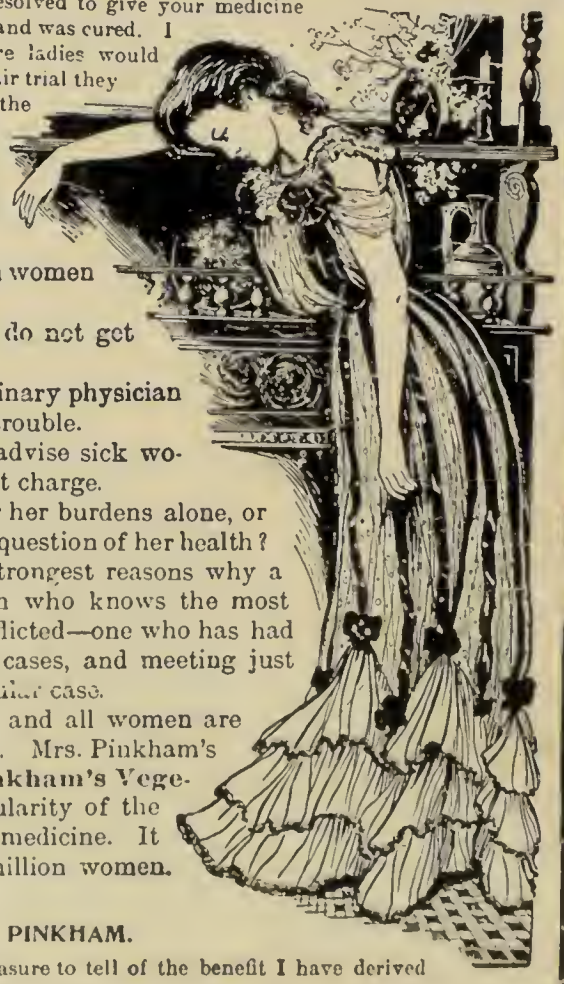

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